

1892-93 Columbian Exposition Half Dollar



Number of coins struck: November 30, 1892 – 54,000; December 31, 1892 – 896,000; January 31, 1893 – 864,000; February 28, 1893 – 1,126,000; March 31, 1893 – 2,062,105. Obverse designed by Charles Barber reverse by George T. Morgan both of the Philadelphia Mint. Distributed by A. F. Seeberger, Treasurer World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago. A Gregg Bingham coin.

Authorized by Congress on August 5, 1892 and issued to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. An International Exposition of arts, industries, manufactures, and products of the soil, mine, and sea, was held in the city of Chicago, Illinois May 1 – Oct 30, 1893.

Design:

Obverse: UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. Bust of COLUMBUS to right; below, COLUMBIAN HALF DOLLAR; Small B on collar for Barber.

Reverse: WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION CHICAGO. A ship, sailing to left; below, two hemispheres, divided by which is the date 14-92; below, 1892. Morgan's initial is cleverly hidden within the rigging of the ship, at the lower right of the mainsail.

“ . . . After presentation of the report of the Committee to Congress, on May 20, 1892, vigorous efforts were made to secure the passage of the bill appropriating \$5,000,000 in aid to the Exposition. The difficulties in the way of the bill can scarcely be overestimated. They included every kind of misrepresentation and just criticisms, often unjust, arising from failure to appreciate the character of the undertaking. Moreover, the political situation at the time entered into and complicated the difficulties of the task. A presidential election was approaching, and public measures were invariably considered with a view to their bearing upon this event. It was intimated if the company would accept a loan instead of a direct appropriation, this form of aid might be secured. The Board of Directors rejected this proposition, and refused to be put in the attitude of suppliants for favor when they were conscious of the justice of their demands. The struggle continued through June and July, and it became apparent that the bill could not pass. The time approached for Congress to adjourn, and in the mean time the Directory had entered into contracts in excess of the total amount of its capital stock, including the proceeds of the city bonds. Deep anxiety was felt, but there was no thought of changing the request for an appropriation to a request for a loan.



VIEW IN JACKSON PARK,
before ground was broken for the Exposition.

A History of the World's Columbian Exposition, Vol. 1, Narrative, D. Appleton and Company, 1897, p. 17.

The Committee on Finance quietly conferred with prominent stockholders and wealthy citizens, and had in hand a half-formed plan that in case the loan were tendered it should be promptly rejected and the entire amount necessary for the Exposition be raised by a loan in Chicago.

A change of tactics was thought advisable, and after consultation with friends of the Exposition a bill was prepared and introduced early in July, 1892, instructing the Secretary of the Treasury to have coined, out of the uncurrent subsidiary coin in the Treasury, \$5,000,000 worth of Columbian half dollars, the devices and designs for which should be prescribed by the director of the mint, these coins to be paid by the Secretary of the Treasury to the World's Columbian Exposition, upon estimates and vouchers certified to its President and by the Director General, 'for the purpose of completing in a suitable manner the work of preparation for inaugurating the World's Columbian Exposition.' Action upon this bill in the House was delayed from time to time. In the Senate the feeling toward the Exposition was more friendly, and as the outlook became less promising for action in

the House, the Senate attached the Souvenir-coin Bill to the Sundry Civil Bill, and returned the latter to the House with this amendment. Conference between the two Houses ensued, and finally the House, by a small majority, voted to instruct its conferees to agree to the Senate's amendment. At this point occurred a most remarkable instance of 'filibustering.'* A motion to reconsider the vote instructing the House conferees to agree to the Senate's amendment was made, and several days wore away in dilatory motions and parliamentary tactics for the purpose of tiring out the friends of the bill and defeating the appropriation. Members were anxious for adjournment. There was nothing to hinder this except the Sundry Civil Bill, the passage of which was necessary to the conduct of the Government. Had this bill passed without a souvenir-coin measure attached, the friends of the Exposition never would have been able to hold Congress together for the purpose of obtaining an appropriation for the Exposition. A day was fixed for adjournment, and as the time drew near the anxiety to secure the passage of the Sundry Civil Bill increased. The Senate was staunch in its support of the Exposition measure. Finally both parties, weary of the controversy and suffering from the intense heat of August in Washington, agreed upon a compromise. The Senate amendment was stricken from the bill, and a bill was introduced for the appropriation of \$2,500,000 in Columbian half dollars, instead of \$5,000,000, as named in the original measure. Both bills passed without opposition, and the souvenir-coin measure became a law by the approval of the President on August 5, 1892. The appropriation was coupled with a condition that the Exposition should be closed to the public on Sundays. These five million half dollars would have yielded the Exposition, at par, only \$2,500,000, and the measure was a compromise consented to with bad grace by the enemies of the Exposition, and accepted in a like spirit by its friends. Immediately afterward a plan was devised for selling these souvenir coins at a premium.

The passage of this act cleared the financial horizon, inasmuch as by the aid of the sum appropriated it was possible to obtain the amount still required to complete the work. On the faith of this appropriation and the other financial resources of the company steps were taken immediately to float an issue of \$5,000,000 of the World's Columbian Exposition six-percent debenture bonds.

* act in an obstructive manner in a legislature, especially by speaking at inordinate length.

Four million dollars of these bonds were authorized first, with the proviso that the entire issue should not exceed five millions. Later the fifth million was also authorized. The Committee on Finance, in the autumn of 1892, undertook the double task of selling the Columbian half dollars at one dollar each and floating this issue of bonds. A design was prepared for the Columbian half dollars, bearing suitable inscriptions, with a profile made from the Lotto portrait of Columbus on the obverse, and a Spanish caravel on the reverse. The time required for the preparation of the dies and minting of coin delayed the delivery of the first half dollar until winter. Nearly a million were received during December, 1892, and after this time they were delivered as rapidly as the mint could turn them out. . .”¹

“The devices of the ‘Columbian Half-Dollar’ have apparently been giving trouble to the Managers of the Chicago Exposition or to the Mint authorities, if one may judge by the various conflicting accounts which have appeared, purporting to describe them; we have two entirely different descriptions, with illustrations; but the obverse, which it is said will bear either a head, bust, or figure of Columbus, seems to be still under discussion at date of writing; one of the latest reports states that the head is to follow a Spanish portrait, while another contradicts this, and the latest development corroborates the claim that there is no authentic portrait of Columbus. One account shows the main building of the group at Chicago, with its large dome, as the device for the reverse; another gives an ocean scene, with the three vessels sailing westward. At the present moment all that is certainly known is that the first designs submitted were not approved; and the cuts which have been engraved for the newspaper descriptions are only approximate resemblances to the proposed ‘coin.’ By the date of the next issue of the *Journal* the matter will doubtless be definitely settled. *Is this a ‘coin?’* It is called a ‘souvenir Half Dollar’ in the newspapers. We are waiting with interest to see whether the Mint authorities will decide it to be a coin or not.

The Managers of the Exposition will realize, it seems probable, a very handsome sum from premiums on the new coins; but whether ‘they will get 100 percent,’ may be doubted, though that is the modest estimate which some are making. For the first impression which falls from the dies, the Remington Company are said to have offered \$10,000, and other large offers are also reported. The singular part of this business is, that the United States Government should be, even though indirectly, a party to a scheme to make money by the sale to the people of the work of its own servants. This is a matter on which as yet little has been said, but it certainly is a ‘new departure,’ and of questionable propriety. . .”²

“ . . . Because the Mint wished to exercise some control over these commemorative coins, the final bill provided that ‘the devices and designs. . . shall be prescribed by the Director of the Mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury.’

This provision appeared because the people of the Mint were just recovering from an unpleasant entanglement with the National Commission over the Columbian half dollar. The Commission had given the design of the coin to a sculptor named U.S.J Dunbar who prepared a plaster model of Columbus for the obverse, or major, side of the coin.

The Mint registered objections to the bust and demanded Mr. Dunbar be removed as designer. The Mint’s chief engraver, Charles Barber, then remodeled another head of Columbus, which he took from a Spanish medal. The Commission wanted for the reverse, or secondary side, of the coin, a representation of the Santa Maria, the flagship of Columbus’ fleet, sailing above two globes. When this design was submitted in plaster Charles Barber again objected, with some point, this arrangement being later lampooned as the ‘ship on wheels.’ Mr. Barber’s assistant engraver George T. Morgan did this model over again. In order to placate ruffled feelings at the Mint, Congress gave final approval to the Isabella quarter to E.C. Leech, the Director of the Mint. . .”³

¹ *A History of the World’s Columbian Exposition*, Vol. 1, Finance and Ways and Means. D. Appleton and Company, 1897, p. 63-64.

² *American Journal of Numismatics*, Editorial, July, 1892—July, 1893, p. 47-48.

³ *Mementoes of an Emancipated Era. Courtesy of The Fair Women*, by Jeanne Madeline Weimann, Chicago Academy Publishers, 1981, p. 478-479.

RG104 R-235 Vol 65

August 4, 1892.

The Superintendent, U. S. Mint,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Sir:

I forward to you by express to-day a box containing a plaster cast of the head of Columbus, selected by the World's Fair, for the souvenir coins.

You will please instruct the engravers to prepare sketches of the same and when finished submit them to this bureau for the approval of the Commission.

I also enclose herewith, a copy of a letter received from Mr. Wm E. Curtis, chief of the bureau of the American Republics, giving a history of the portrait from which this plaster cast has been made.

Very respectfully,

R. E. Preston,

Acting Director.

August 9, 1892.

Messrs. Zimmerman and Forshay,
11 Wall Street, New York.

Gentlemen:

In reply to your letter of the 8th inst., in reference to the Columbian half-dollars, I would state that as soon as coined they will be paid over to the managers of the exposition who will have the entire disposal of them.

Very respectfully,

R. E. Preston,

Acting Director of the Mint.

August 13, 1892.

Wm. M. Meredith, Esq.,

Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

Sir:

In preparing the dies for the new Columbian half-dollar it is essential that the engraver of the mint at Philadelphia should have a copy of the photograph of the Lotto portrait of Columbus, and I would be pleased if you could find it in your power to furnish this bureau with the same.

Very respectfully,
R. E. Preston,
Acting Director.

August 15, 1892.

The Superintendent, U. S. Mint,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Sir:

I transmit herewith a photograph of the Lotto portrait of Columbus, requested in your letter of the 8th inst., for the use of the engraver in preparing the dies for the Columbian half-dollar.

This is the same photograph used by Mr. Dunbar in making the plaster cast.

Very respectfully,
R. E. Preston,
Acting Director.

ready we can strike the pieces at the rate of possibly a million a month.

The matter of engraving the dies is the one feature of coinage which cannot be hurried, as a mother hub must first be prepared with great care and the working dies made from it.

Very respectfully,

E. O. Leech,

Director of the Mint.

September 2, 1892.

W. F. MacLennan, Esq.,

Warrant Division,

Treasury Department.

Sir:

I would be pleased for you to accompany me to Philadelphia on the 5th instant to consult with the Superintendent of the Mint in that city relative to the coins and medals for the World's Exposition, as representing the Secretary's Office.

Your actual and necessary expenses will be paid.

Respectfully yours,

E. O. Leech,

Director of the Mint.

September 3, 1892.

Superintendent Mint U. S.,
Philadelphia, Penna.

Telegram confirmed to meet him at Mint, say at one o'clock on Monday on matters connected with designs for souvenir coins for World's Fair. If it is inconvenient for him to be at Mint on Monday, I can see him on Tuesday. Will be at Mint about one o'clock Monday.

E. O. Leech,
Director, Mint.

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September 3, 1892.

Dana Bickford, Esq.,
Rockingham,
Portsmouth, N. H.

Sir:

In reply to your letter of the 29th ultimo, I have to inform you that the Government will make no exhibit of coins at the Columbian Exposition, except such as are authorized by law.

The design for the souvenir half dollar was selected by the managers of the Exposition.

Respectfully yours,
E. O. Leech,
Director of the Mint.

September 9, 1892.

F. W. Peck, Esq.,

Chairman Finance Committee World's Columbian Exposition,
Chicago, Illinois.

Dear Sir:

Your esteemed favor of the 31st ultimo, together with a sketch of a design for the reverse of the Columbian souvenir half dollar, reached me, and I have spent two days in conference with the officers of the Mint in reference thereto.

In the first place I should say that at my request the Secretary of State has called to our Minister at Madrid to forward one of the medals containing the head of Columbus selected by you from the wood cut sent you, as a very much better likeness can be engraved from the medal itself than from a wood cut in an illustrated paper. In the meantime, the Engraving Department of the Mint at Philadelphia will proceed to prepare the model of the head of Columbus. The preliminary steps are, first, to prepare the model in wax, from which a cast is made in plaster, and an electro-plate in copper, from which the master die is engraved. The head will be corrected from the medal, if any corrections are necessary, when the medal is received.

In regard to the design for the reverse of the coin, I send you by express to-day a package containing the designs. That marked No. 1 is the same as the design forwarded by you, with the inscriptions displayed, as suggested by me. In the judgment of the officers of the Mint this will not appear well, or show to advantage when executed as a coin. For this reason the Engraver of the Mint has suggested a change as shown in design No. 2, which we think would make a richer and better coin. In order that the managers of the Exposition may form a better idea of these designs when struck in low relief, two specimens are submitted for your examination. The bronze medal was carefully prepared and shows the Continent of North America, and will give you a good idea of how the Columbian coin would appear if executed as shown in sketch 1. That some idea may be formed of how the coin would look if struck according to sketch No. 2, the Engraver of the Mint has very hastily and crudely prepared an example in lead. It will be distinctly understood that this specimen is not to be critically examined for details, but for general effect only, as no attempt to enter into detail has been made. I submit the design and

"On August 13, 1892, Mr. R.E. Preston, Acting Director of the U.S. Mint, wrote a letter to Mr. Wm. M. Meredith, Esq., of the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing, stating 'In preparing the dies for the new Columbian half-dollar it is essential that the engraver of the mint at Philadelphia, Charles Barber, should have a copy of the photograph of the Lotto portrait of Columbus, and I would be pleased if you could find it in your power to furnish this bureau with the same.

NARA-CP (College Park, Maryland), RG (Record Group) 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 293.

August 17, 1892

Hon. George R. Davis
Director General, Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Ill.

Sir:

I enclose herewith for payment the account of U. S. J. Dunbar for making the plaster model of the head of Columbus for the world's Columbian Exposition souvenir half-dollar, amounting to \$150.45.

This expense is properly payable by the Exposition as this office has no appropriation available for the purpose.

Very respectfully,

R. E. Preston
Acting Director of the Mint

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 312.

August 17, 1892

Hon. George R. Davis
Director General, Columbian Exposition

Chicago, Ill.

Sir:

I send you herewith by registered mail, sketches of the designs for the Columbian Exposition Souvenir half-dollar.

I will thank you to examine the same and return with such suggestions as you may think proper to make.

You will be afforded an opportunity to consult with the Department before the designs are finally adopted.

Very respectfully,

R. E. Preston
Acting Director of the Mint

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 313.

August 26, 1892

Hon. George R. Davis, Esq.,
Director General, World's Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Ill.

My dear General: On the 17th inst. There was sent you by registered mail from this bureau sketches of the designs of the half-dollar to be struck in commemoration of the World's Exposition at Chicago.

You will understand that the portrait of Columbus in the sketch of the new coins was the one selected by the President of the World's Columbian Exposition for the souvenir coin, being recognized by experts as nearly authentic as any in existence, and that the model in plaster was made under the direction of Mr. Wm. E. Curtis by Mr. Dunbar, a sculptor of this city.

Enclosed herewith I send you a copy of the medal that is being made by the Spaniards to commemorate the Exposition at Madrid, cut from an illustrated paper, and loaned me by Mr. Wm E. Curtis. I will thank you to return it at your earliest convenience.

If the head which has been suggested in the sketch sent you is not satisfactory, possibly the head upon this medal could be used.

As it will take a long time to prepare the dies and strike 5,000,000 pieces of half dollars I would suggest that you give this matter prompt attention.

You will please understand that the Department will be governed entirely by the wishes of the World's Columbian Exposition people, but it is high time that something definite was being accomplished in the matter.

Very respectfully,

E. O. Leech
Director of the Mint

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 345-346.



FERDINAND W. PECK,
first Vice-President of the Directors
and Chairman of the Committee
on Finance, 1892-1893.

A History of the World's Columbian Exposition, Vol. 1, Narrative. D. Appleton and Company, 1897, p. 83. Ferdinand W. Peck would go on to be the Director-General of the Paris Exposition of 1900.

August 27, 1892

Ferdinand W. Peck, Esq.,
World's Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Ills.

Sir:

Replying to your favor of the 25th inst. Relative to the souvenir half-dollar for the World's Columbian Exposition, I would say that the Department will place upon the coin such designs as are agreed upon by- the World's Columbian Exposition people. I respectfully refer you to a letter addressed to the Secretary yesterday to Mr. George R. Davis, the Director General.

I would state that the Department has received communications on this subject from Mr. Davis, Mr. Baker, Mr. Butterworth, Mr. Thatcher, and other representatives of the World's Columbian Exposition.

It would be very agreeable to the Department if the World's Fair people would decide conclusively as to who is to have charge of the approval of the designs selected by the Department that we may proceed promptly with the preparation of the models, and the engraving of the dies, preliminary to coinage.

I see no objection to the suggestions contained in your letter of the 25th inst. Except for the size of the half-dollars.

In regard to the size of the half-dollar I will have to confer with the mint people in Philadelphia, as I am under the impression that our cutting presses and coining apparatus are arranged for a half-dollar of the present thickness and diameter.

In regards to your query as to when the coins can be ready after the designs have been decided upon I would say that it will take at least four months to engrave the dies. As soon as the dies are (rest of this missing from the Mint Archives).

August 31, 1892

James W. Ellsworth, Esq.,
Chicago, Illinois

Sir:

Replying to your telegram of to-day relative to the head of Columbus reproduced from the Lotto portrait, I would say that I have left the matter of the selection of the head of Columbus for the souvenir half dollar entirely in the hands of the World's Fair people.

Whatever head they select will be placed upon the coins and such design for the reverse as they may select. The delay in the selection of the designs will necessarily retard the striking and issue of the coins.

Very respectfully,
E. O. Leech, Director of the Mint

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 367.

September 3, 1892

My dear Mr. Harrison:

Referring to yours of the 1st instant, I would say that the World's Fair people have not accepted the portrait of Columbus first selected for the souvenir coin, and are considering a head of Columbus which I sent them, and which has just appeared on a medal struck by the Spanish government in commemoration of the Exposition. The matter of the selection of the head of Columbus for the obverse of the new souvenir half dollar, as well as the selection of a suitable design for the reverse, is still in the hands of the World's Fair people. After the design is agreed upon sketches will first be made and afterwards the impression in wax, from which the mother hub and working dies will be engraved. This will cover a period of probably four months.

Very respectfully,

E. O. Leech
Director of the Mint

Russell B. Harrison, Esq.
No. 1 Broadway
New York City

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 389.

September 7, 1892

Hon. John W. Foster
Secretary of State
Washington, D.C.

Sir:

Upon the recommendation of the Managers of the World's Columbian Exposition, the Department has adopted for the obverse of the souvenir half-dollar authorized to be struck in commemoration of the Columbian Exposition, the head of Columbus as appears on a medal struck recently at Madrid by the Spanish government. The medal was designed by Lopez, and is known as the Spanish-American medal in honor of the Columbian Exposition.

A wood cut of the medal which appeared in an illustrated Spanish paper was furnished the Department by Mr. W. E. Curtis, and was sent by the Department to the World's Fair people.

This head having been agreed upon, it is apparent a more perfect likeness can be made from the medal itself than from a wood cut. I have therefore, the honor to request that you will cable our Minister at Madrid to obtain a bronze copy of this medal at once, and forward without delay by registered mail to the Director of the Mint at Washington. Any expense connected with the purchase of the medal will be paid from the appropriation for the support of the Mint Service.

Very respectfully,

O. L. Spaulding
Acting Secretary

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 411-412.

September 9, 1892

Superintendent Mint U.S.
Philadelphia, Penna.

Sir:

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your favor of yesterday enclosing a letter from Mr. Barber, the Engraver of the Mint, and also of the package containing the designs for the souvenir half-dollars, which I have forwarded to the World's Fair people, with the suggestions contained in Mr. Barber's letter.

As soon as I hear from them I will return the designs with such instructions as may be necessary in the premises.

Respectfully yours,

E. O. Leech
Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 420.

September 9, 1892

F.W. Peck, Esq.,
Chairman Finance Committee Worlds Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Sir:

Your esteemed favor of the 31st ultimo, together with a sketch of a design for the reverse of the Columbian souvenir half dollar, reached me, and I have spent two days in conference with the officers of the Mint in reference thereto (rest of this missing from the Mint Archives)

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 423.

In the first place I should say that at my request the Secretary of State has called to our Minister at Madrid to forward one of the medals containing the head of Columbus selected by you from the wood cut sent you, as a very much better likeness can be engraved from the medal itself than from a wood cut in an illustrated paper. In the meantime, the Engraving Department of the Mint at Philadelphia will proceed to prepare the model of the head of Columbus. The preliminary steps are, first, to prepare the model in wax, from which a cast is made in plaster, and an electro-plate in copper, from which the master die is engraved. The head will be corrected from the medal, if any corrections are necessary, when the medal is received.

In regard to the design for the reverse of the coin, I send you by express to-day a package containing the designs. That marked No. 1 is the same as the design forwarded by you, with the inscriptions displayed, as suggested by me. In the judgment of the officers of the Mint this will not appear well, or show to advantage when executed as a coin. For this reason the Engraver of the Mint has suggested a change as shown in design No. 2, which we think would make a richer and better coin. In order that the managers of the Exposition may form a better idea of these designs when struck in low relief, two specimens are submitted for your examination. The bronze medal was carefully prepared and shows the Continent of North America, and will give you a good idea of how the Columbian coin would appear if executed as shown in sketch 1. That some idea may be formed of how the coin would look if struck according to sketch No. 2, the Engraver of the Mint has very hastily and crudely prepared an example in lead. It will be distinctly understood that this specimen is not to be critically examined for details, but for general effect only, as no attempt to enter into detail has been made. I submit the design and

impressions for your examination and suggestions, with the request that they be returned promptly to this Bureau. On the judgment of the officers of the Mint, in which I concur, the caravel should be omitted, as there will not be space on a coin the size of a half dollar to properly represent ships. Referring to a previous suggestion, that the coins be struck of a different size from the present half dollar, I would say that this cannot be done for the reason that it is contrary to law. The act of September 26, 1890, provides:

"That no change be made in the diameter of any coin."

Besides it would necessitate the preparation of new moulds, new cutters, new tubes for feeding, new collars and counting boxes, and an entire change in the machinery now used at the Mint, all of which would incur delay and expense. I need hardly add that it is highly important that these sketches should be returned at the earliest possible moment, as it will be the effort of the Mint to facilitate in every way the prompt striking of these coins.

I beg to say now that no effort will be spared to furnish these coins as rapidly as it is possible to do it.

The matter of engraving, especially portrait engraving, is one that cannot be hurried except by elighting the work. As soon as the dies can be engraved, the work of striking the coins, can be expedited to suit your convenience.

Respectfully yours,
E. O. Beech,
Director of the Mint.

September 10, 1892

F.W. Peck, Esq.,
Worlds Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Sir:

Upon the receipt of your two communications of the 8th instant this morning, I telegraphed you as follows:

'Letter and package sent you yesterday, which fully answer your letters of the 8th instant. Letter by mail.'

As I have stated to Mr. Davis and Mr. Higinbotham, the Department will await your pleasure in the matter of the designs for the half dollar, and will adopt such designs as the officers of the Exposition finally agree upon provided they can be adapted to a coin the size of the half dollar.

In reply to your query as to whether the Western Continent will look reasonably well upon the coins, I would say that it is the opinion of the Engraver of the Mint at Philadelphia, with whom I have conferred in this subject, that the sketch of the Western Hemisphere sent you prepared by him with meridians, parallels and great circles will look reasonably well on the coin. You can form a very crude idea of how it will look from the lead sample sent you.

It is impossible for me to say at this date whether I will be able to be present on the occasion of the dedication ceremonies in Chicago next month, but it is my intention to be present if public business does not prevent.

Respectfully yours,

E.O. Leech
Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 431.

September 10, 1892

Messrs George R. Davis and
S. N. Higinbotham
Worlds Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Illinois

Gentlemen:

Your telegram of the 9th instant reached me last evening, and I immediately telegraphed you to await a letter and package sent yesterday, to Mr. F.W. Peck containing designs and suggestions relative to the souvenir half dollar. I beg to say that the Department will await your pleasure in the matter of the designs for the half dollar, and will adopt such design as you finally agree upon, provided they can be adapted to a coin the size of the half dollar.

Respectfully yours,

E.O. Leech
Director of the Mint

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 432.

September 12, 1892

F.W. Peck, Esq.
World's Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Illinois

Sir:

Some time ago Mr. U.S.J. Dunbar, a sculptor of this City, prepared for Mr. W.E. Curtis, of the Bureau of American Republics, a profile of the Lotto portrait of Columbus, which had been selected as a design for the obverse of the souvenir Columbian half dollar. Mr. Dunbar rendered a bill for his services in preparing this profile, amounting to \$150.45, which was forwarded by Mr. Curtis to the World's Fair people for payment. Mr. Dunbar informs me that he has never received payment for his services. The bill was a reasonable one and was contracted under the authority of Mr. Curtis with the understanding that the expenses would be paid by the Worlds Fair people. I would suggest in justice to Mr. Dunbar that this matter be promptly attended to.

Respectfully yours,

E.O. Leech
Director of the Mint

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 440.

Phila., September 21, 1892

Mr. Charles E. Barber
Engraver of the Mint



A proof-like Columbian half dollar I used to own.

Sir:

You are authorized and requested to proceed to Chicago and confer with General Davis and the officers of the Columbian Exposition, relative to the souvenir half dollar.

You have full authority to act for me in the premise.

Your necessary expenses will be paid.

Yours respectfully,

E. O. Leech
Director of the Mint

September 28, 1892

Hon. George R. Davis
Director General, World's Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Ills.

My dear General,

Mr. Barber the engraver at the mint at Philadelphia has just left me, and exhibited to me the designs agreed upon by your people for the souvenir half-dollar, viz: the profile of the Lotto head of Columbus, made by Mr. Warner, under your direction, for the obverse of the coin, and the caravel and globes for the reverse.

The selections made are, in my judgment, very fitting, and the designs will make a very handsome coin. The specimen half-dollar submitted to you by Mr. Barber, exhibiting the caravel and globes, of course, was very quickly and crudely prepared, and will be improved upon considerably in the final designs. For instance, on the globes one will exhibit the outlines of the continents, which will be an addition of considerable value, and we will also make the lettering conform to the views entertained by the world's fair people.

The head of Columbus selected is a very noble one and I believe will be generally approved. Of course, there will be some criticism as there would be if any head was selected.

I have instructed the engraver of the mint to proceed without delay to prepare the designs casts and dies for this coinage, and the facilities of the mint will be pushed to their utmost to execute this coinage promptly and to your satisfaction. I have instructed the Superintendent of the mint that it is to take precedence to all other business, and have arranged for the purchase of some additional machinery which will facilitate the working of the coiner's department so as not to delay the full capacity of the press room which is somewhat ahead of some other branches of the coiners department.

For your information I would say that is my belief that the dies will be finished, ready for the press, by the first day of December of this year, and I believe that I can strike and deliver to your order 1,000,000 pieces in the month of December.

No pieces will be delivered to any one except upon the order of the proper authority from the World's Columbian Exposition. A few experimental pieces will be struck to test the dies, possibly ten or a dozen which will be turned over to me and which I will use at my discretion, but no other pieces will be struck except those to be furnished under order from the Worlds Fair Commission.

In this connection I call your attention to the requirements of the act of August 5, 1892, requiring that certain estimates and vouchers shall be filed with the Secretary of the Treasury before these coins can be supplied. I give you this timely notice so that there may be no legal delay in supplying you with the coins promptly as soon as they are struck at the mint.

It is my impression that one can coin and deliver 250,000 of these coins, that is, \$125,000 a week. Assistant Secretary Nettleton showed me this morning the designs for a new one dollar Treasury note which will be submitted to the Secretary, to be issued commemorative of the exposition. The note contained on one side a portrait of Columbus as represented in the Marine Gallery at Madrid said to be owned or controlled by Col. Lowdermilk of this city. The reverse contains the picture of the rotunda of the capitol, representing the landing of Columbus.

Gen. Nettleton suggested that I ask the World's Fair people whether there would be any objection to using on this note the head of Columbus adopted for the souvenir half dollar, and if not whether there would be any objection to using the Lotto portrait itself. . .

I would also state that the Post office authorities have asked me to select for them a head of Columbus for a new postage stamp commemorative of the exposition. I desire to know whether there would be any objection on the part of the World's Fair Commission to permitting the Post office Department to use the head of Columbus selected for the souvenir half dollar, for the new postage stamp.

Please reply explicitly and authoritatively to each of these points.

I also beg to inquire whether there would be any objection to my giving a sketch or photograph of the obverse and reverse of the coins to some of the illustrated papers and magazines of the country. They are pressing me in the matter and I have declined to do so except with the approval of the World's Fair people.

We are still awaiting some action upon the part of the World's Fair Commission in regard to the designs for the 50,000 bronze award medals, and also for the diplomas, although I have nothing to do with the latter. Captain Meredith, Chief of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, has prepared some designs, I believe, for the diplomas and objects to competition. The Department is awaiting some action upon the part of the World's Fair Commission in the matter of authoritative suggestions on this subject.

Very respectfully,

E. O. Leech
Director of the Mint

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 493-495.

November 19, 1892

Superintendent U.S. Mint
Philadelphia, Pa.

When will you be ready to deliver the first million of souvenir coins?

R.G. Preston
Acting Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 66, p. 227.

November 19, 1892

F.W. Peck
Vice President-World's Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Ills.

Begin striking souvenir coins to-day. Will coin three hundred thousand pieces in November and seven hundred thousand in December.

R.G. Preston
Acting Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 66, p. 227.

November 21, 1892

The Superintendent, U.S. Mint
Philadelphia, Pa.

Sir:

I enclose herewith, for your information, copy of the act authorizing the coinage of the souvenir half dollar, and call your attention to the fact that the World's Fair management have not as yet complied with act. Until they have done so (of which fact you will be notified) you will retain these coins in your custody.

R.G. Preston
Acting Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 231.

November 25, 1892

A.F. Seeberger, Esq.,
Treasurer World's Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Illinois

Sir:

In reply to your letter of the 18th instant, requesting that the Columbian half-dollars be put up in rolls of twenty-five, and packed in boxes, I will state that it is impracticable to comply with your request, as it would require an increased force at the Philadelphia Mint beyond our resources, and besides would incur great risk of speculation were the coins to pass through so many hands. All that can be done is simply to bag and deliver the coin in the usual way.

Respectfully yours,

R.E. Preston
Acting Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 66, p. 247.

December 5, 1892

A.F. Seeberger, Esq.,
Treasurer World's Columbian Exposition
Chicago, Illinois

Sir:

In reply to your letter of the 2nd instant, you are informed that a proof coin is one in which the planchet is highly polished before being placed under the dies, and that it would be impossible for the Mint to undertake to make proof coins of all the Columbian souvenir half-dollars. Therefore, they will simply be like the ordinary silver coins when first turned out from the Mint.

Respectfully yours,

R.E. Preston
Acting Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 283.

December 15, 1892

The Superintendent, U.S. Mint
Philadelphia, Pa.

Sir:

I am advised by the Chief Clerk of the Treasury Department that the Managers of the World's Columbian Exposition have furnished so far \$800,000 in vouchers, and as soon as these vouchers are passed upon and approved by the accounting officers, warrants will be issued on the Treasurer for the amounts of the same, and which will be made payable in Columbian half dollars.

These vouchers will be passed upon at the rate of \$25,000 to \$50,000 a day, and you should, therefore, make preparations to make such coinage of these half dollars as will enable you to meet promptly the orders of the Treasurer for the same, and thus avoid all complaints of delay.

On November 19th you were telegraphed in inquiry how many of these coins would be manufactured by the first of January. Your reply was 300,000 in November and 700,000 in December a total of 1,000,000 by the first of January.

I notice from your cashier's daily statement of the 13th inst., that you have on hand about \$140,000 in these coins.

It behooves you to make some effort to increase the coinage of the same, and I trust that you will give this matter your immediate attention.

Respectfully yours,

R.E. Preston
Acting Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 339.

December 15, 1892

Superintendent Mint U.S.
Philadelphia, Pa.

Sir:

I enclose herewith copy of a letter received from the Secretary of the Treasury, enclosing one from the President of the World's Columbian Exposition, in regard to Columbian half-dollars Nos. 1, 400, 1492,-- and 1892, and have to request that you will take such measures as will insure a compliance with the request of Mr. Higinbotham.

Respectfully yours,

R.E. Preston
Acting Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 340.

December 15, 1892

Superintendent Mint U.S.
Philadelphia, Pa.

How many souvenir half dollars will you be able to ship to Chicago by the twenty-second instant? Demand very urgent.

R.E. Preston
Acting Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 340.

January 9, 1893

Superintendent, U.S. Mint
Philadelphia, Pa.

Strike me three or four souvenir half-dollars on polished planchets and forward them without fail to-day. I was disappointed beyond measure that not a single copy of these new coins was sent to me in Europe to show the representatives of foreign Governments, who struck coin in our honor while there.

E.O. Leech
Director, Mint

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 414.

January 10, 1893

O.E. Bosbyshell, Esq.,
Superintendent, U.S. Mint

Philadelphia, Pa.

My dear Colonel:

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of yesterday containing two of the souvenir half-dollars which you state you were directed by Mr. Higinbotham to take out of the deliveries of the day, together with others, for such distribution as you thought proper. Enclosed herewith I send you the value of the same.

I note what you state as to the reason why the directions which I left, to have a few of these coins forwarded to me in Brussels were not carried out. 'My instructions were positive, not to deliver a single piece unless upon order of the Secretary of the Treasury.' I fail to find any such order on file in this office.



Col. Oliver Christian Bosbyshell, 4th Superintendent of the United States Mint at Philadelphia. Courtesy *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated*, Handling Souvenir Coins, February 1893, p. 127.

Mr. Preston informs me that no order was given by the Secretary or himself which conflicted with the directions I had left at the mint. I would be pleased if you would send us a copy of the instructions to which you refer.

It was not necessary to explain to me the distribution of the pieces made as I did not call in question in any way your right to make each distribution as you thought proper. The point I am endeavoring to make is that my instructions to strike and forward a few sample pieces to Brussels were not complied with.

Enclosed herewith I send you a souvenir of my trip to Europe; being a five-franc piece struck in my honor at the mint at Brussels, containing the head of Leopold II the present King of the Belgians, and a special design, emblematic of the meeting of the Conference. This coin was struck in my presence, and only one copy was furnished afterwards to each of the delegates.

I hope to run over very shortly to see you. I thank you for your kindness to me and for your kind expressions in regard to my safe return.

Very truly yours,

E.O. Leech
Director

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 65, p. 417-418.

April 4, 1893

The Superintendent, U.S. Mint
Philadelphia, Pa.

Sir:

You are hereby instructed to destroy the hubs from which the dies for the Columbian half-dollar were prepared. In your original communication on this subject you recommended the destruction of these hubs and authority was then given you to destroy them.

I see no good reason why they should be preserved but on the contrary there is every reason why they should not. You have specimens of the coin in your cabinet so that the record will be complete without the preservation of the hubs from which the dies could be prepared.

Very respectfully,

E.O. Leech

Director of the Mint

NARA-CP, RG 104, entry 235, vol. 67, p. 254.”³

“JAMES W. ELLSWORTH & CO
CHICAGO

Oct. 24th, 1892



Col. James W. Ellsworth. The Lotto Portrait was owned by Col. James W. Ellsworth a member of the Board of Directors for the Worlds Columbian Exposition. Courtesy of the *James W. Ellsworth Collection: Box/Folder #2, Page #45, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library.*

Frank D. Millet
Jackson Park, City.

My Dear Sir:

My understanding with Mr. Warner, in your presence, when we fixed the price at \$750 for work on modeling for the coin and medals, was that he was to make another design without cap for the coin, a design for the reverse of the badges (the three boats and inscription) and a reverse for the official souvenir (which Mr. Butler has taken up with me) for all of which we were to pay \$750.

I herewith enclose your letter received from Mr. Warner and would ask that he make out a bill for \$500 for design for souvenir coin, and the other \$250 for work on the official souvenir. His first talk with me was about \$500 for the designs, obverse and reverse of the souvenir coin and before he finished he stated perhaps that

was too much, so later we fixed \$750 for the whole matter, I repeating what was wanted just as stated above, which I think you will remember.

Will you take the question up with him on the reverse for the official souvenir, showing Columbus' head for obverse as already designed. Mr. Butler, Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee brought-- this to my attention a few days ago, that we ought to get to work upon it.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) James W. Ellsworth

January 19th, 1893

My Dear Col. Bosbyshell:

I am annoyed at the position am placed in regarding the Proof coins. I have delayed writing you thinking the matter would be arranged and coins turned over to me, and they will be undoubtedly yet, but fear you will think I have no appreciation in not having promptly written you at the time they were received by our Treasurer. Mr. Higinbotham when I first told him that is before any of the coins were shipped, he stated, the first coins will have to be delivered on the first orders, but as there were a great many more coins ready than we sent vouchers for I told him we would hold these back until a later shipment, he said all right.

I therefore arranged the matter with the Treasurer, having paid the \$100 for them, and supposed there would be no question relative to the matter, but on receiving your letter that they were shipped. Immediately notified the Treasurer to let him have the package in question.

He now asks that we divide them, but I have promised them all (one of them being intended for you and one for Mr. Barbour (*sic*), among those intended to receive them).

³ U.S. Mint & National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). With assistance from Roger Burdette.

I am in a very awkward position, but guess it will come out all right, for I do not think he would intend it so seriously as it seems on the surface.

Pardon me for not explaining to you earlier, and will you let me do anything for you that may lie in my power at any time.

With kind regard to Mrs. Bosbyshell,

Very sincerely yours,

(Signed) James W. Ellsworth

Col. O. C. Bosbyshell, Sup't.
United States Mint,
Philadelphia, Pa.

January 19th, 1893

My Dear Mr. Barbour (*sic*):

In reply to yours of the 11th, inst., was duly received. I enclosed the clipping to Turner at the Park, asking him if he was responsible for anything of that kind, and I wished to receive his answer before writing you. I was at the Park yesterday, and learn he is in New York, and will not return for a week yet. As soon as he replies you shall hear from me further. Warner was the man that did the work. Turner had nothing to do with it whatever; on the other hand Turner has commended the result of your work to me personally.

Let me tell you something confidentially, and I must write the same thing to Col. Bosbyshell. The Hundred Proof coin that was sent here, when the proposition was first broached by you, and then the Colonel, I spoke to Mr. Higinbotham about it, and told him to be very particular that they were not in any way diverted, he said, the first coins that came must be delivered on the first orders, so I told him I would arrange to have them held back until later.

I had promised the wife of each Director one of these coins, yourself and Col. Bosbyshell, and the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of some of the Railroads, for instance, Mr. Frank Thomson, and Mr. Roberts and others, thereby placing all of them. Especially was I desirous on account of the Railroad people because I am arranging for them to take our last million of Bonds, and they need any little attention as proposed above, but when the coin came Mr. Higinbotham took charge of them, stating he wished them for himself.

I am placed in a very awkward position about the matter, and he proposes now to divide them, but I told him they were all promised, and I could not do it. How it will come out I do not know, but if he writes to you people I hope nothing may be said that may antagonize the final results.

It was very selfish in Mr. Higinbotham to do this, and I am surprised beyond measure. I had thought of taking it up in the Executive Committee meeting, but it is most too small a matter to make so much fuss about, though, I cannot tell you how annoying it proves to me. I had hoped to get them before this, so as not to have to confess to the diversion on account of Mr. Higinbotham, but it cannot be longer delayed, as yourself and the Colonel are doubtless wondering at the silence in acknowledging.

Very sincerely yours,

(Signed) James W. Ellsworth

January 23, 1893

Chicago, Ill.,
Lyman J. Gage, Esq.,
First National Bank, CITY.

My Dear Mr. Gage:

I herewith enclose two letters: one from Col. Bosbyshell, Super. of the Mint; the other from Chas. B. Barbour (*sic*), Engraver – both under date of 21st inst. I would send these to the Finance Committee only that I would not care to have any further correspondence go from the Exposition authorities to the Mint-regarding this, and were these letters not considered confidential I fear it might raise a controversy and result possibly in delaying delivery of coins that are still due.

I wrote Col. Bosbyshell and Mr. Barbour on account of having promised each of them one of the coins in question and explain that they were having held which was the reason they have not heard from me earlier but that the matter would be straightened out, but from the correspondence it seems Mr. Higinbotham had previously written them asking what should be done with them. He is placing me in an ugly embarrassing position and one which I do not deserve, directly or indirectly in connection with our work. I note that Col. Bosbyshell states he has written Mr. Higinbotham that on account of the suggestion coming from myself relative to the minting of this particular hundred coins, etc. That is a mistake as the idea never occurred to me originally, but possibly it was Mr. Barbour that first spoke of it and he talked to Col. Bosbyshell, or I might have said to the Colonel that Mr. Barbour had spoken of it. – I think perhaps that was the way, but I don not like to have it attempted to place me on the defensive.

Everything, in which I was connected with this matter of coinage of these half dollars, has been broad and liberal upon my part. I spent a great deal of money in connection with it, expenses and entertaining, etc., and was glad to do so and now to have my acts questioned in this manner to the Mint Authorities troubles me more than I can explain, and further, it is liable to imperil the placing of the remainder of the bonds.

I shall send a copy of this communication to Mr. Peck, Chairman of the Finance Committee, asking that he take the subject up at the next Committee Meeting, and respectfully request of the Committee that no further action be taken whereby I may seem to be placed in so unfavorable a position.

I again ask that you consider Col. Bosbyshell's and Mr. Barbour's letter confidential and that same will be returned to me.

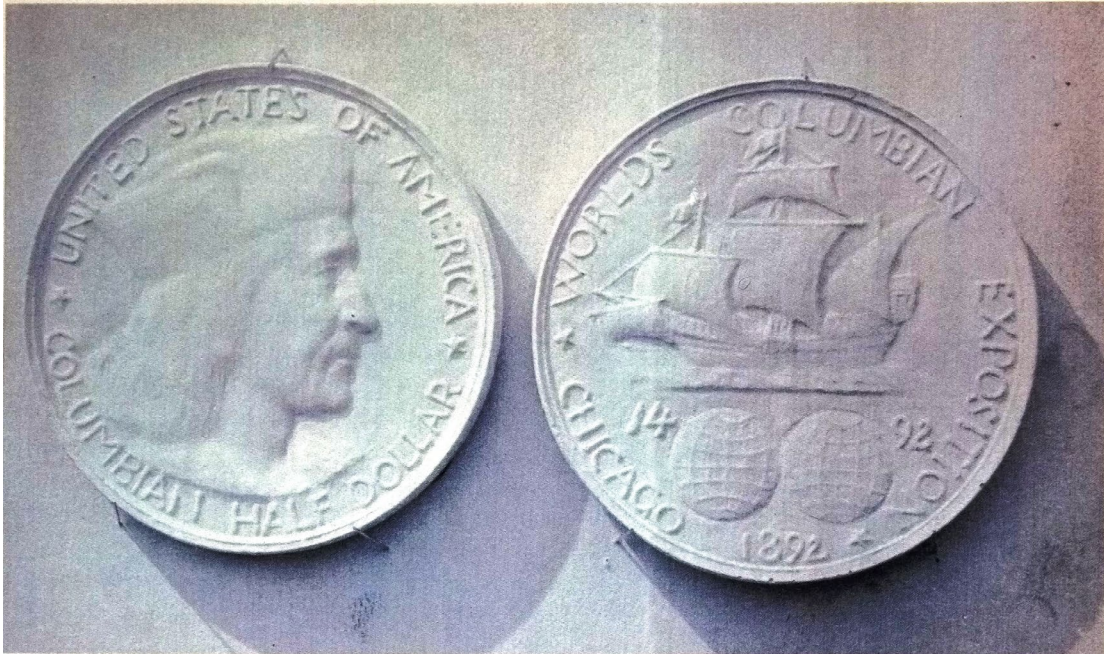
Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) James W. Ellsworth

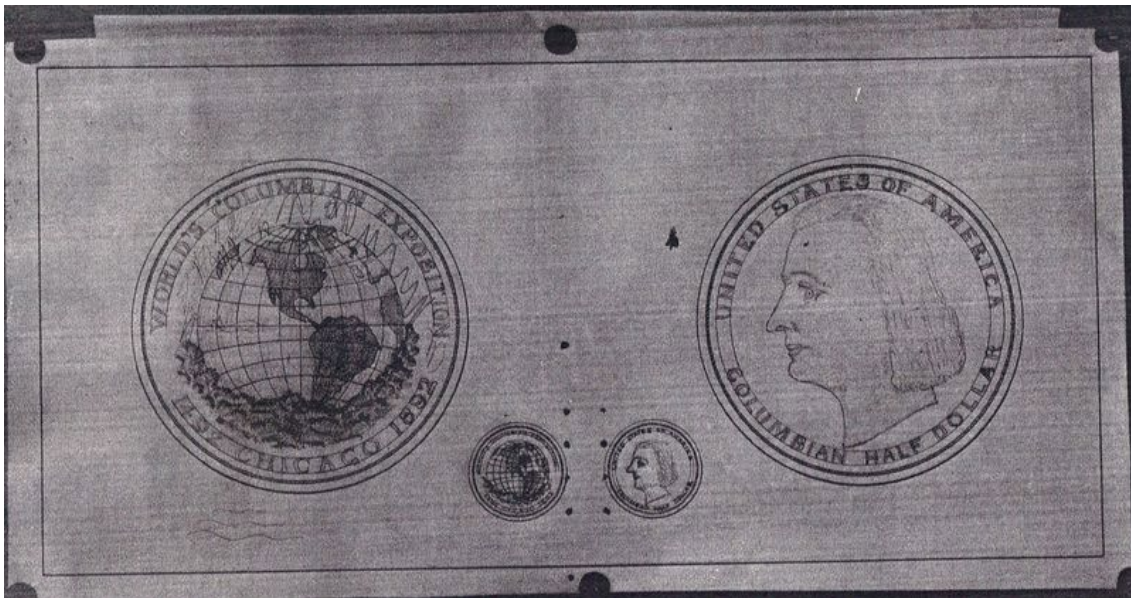
The cost of recoinng 2,500,000 - \$37,500
Express charges on coins from Chicago to Phila. - \$2,198.80
Express charges on coins from Washington to Phil. - \$700
Total: \$40,398.80"⁴

⁴ *James W. Ellsworth Collection, Special Collections, JWE Ephemera: Box/Folder #1, Page #13-15; Box/Folder #1, Page #62-63; Box/Folder #2, Page #45-52; JWE Outgoing: Box/Folder #1, Page #9, 26, 29-31, 57, 70, 72, 75-76; WCE/CDA: V. 12 #88; Chicago Public Library.*

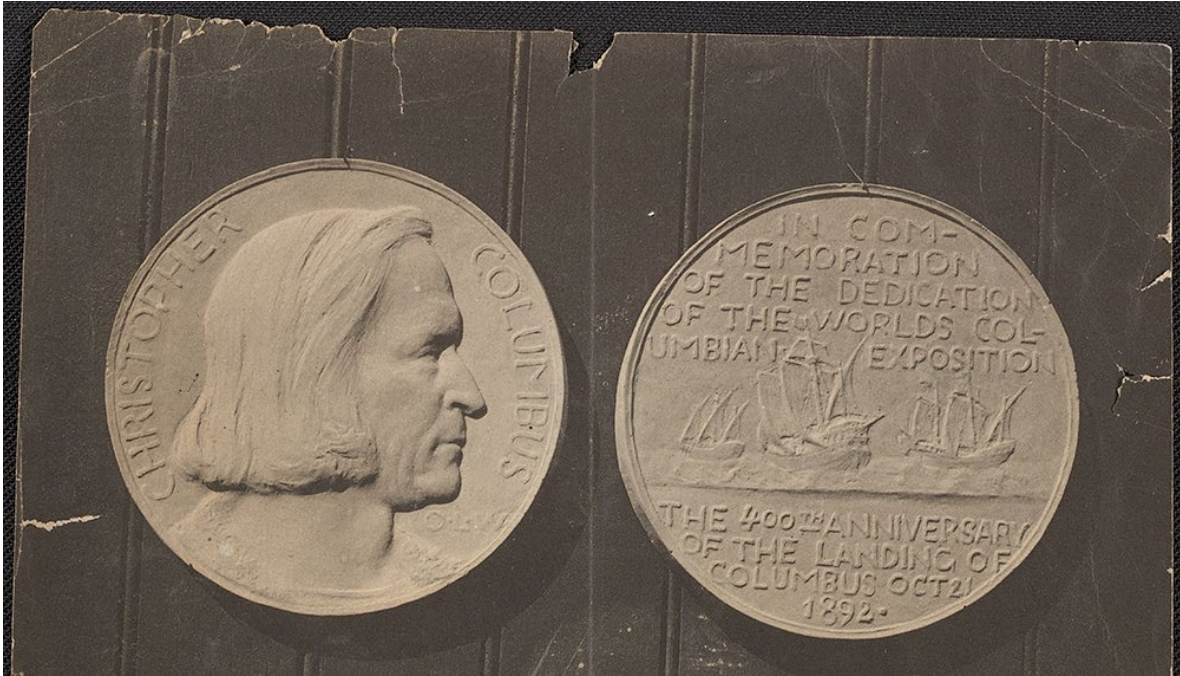
Early models and coins for Columbian Half Dollar



A plaster model from the James Ellsworth Collection, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library.



A sketch from the James Ellsworth Collection, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library.



A plaster model from the *Olin L. Warner Papers*; Archives of American Art.



A plaster model from the *Olin L. Warner Papers*; Archives of American Art.



i85802 (left) and i85803 IPTC – Headline: World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



Olin Warner and family. Courtesy of the LOC.

“HAD IT NOT BEEN for the jealous opposition of Mint engravers Barber and Morgan, many more U.S. coins would have been designed by private artists. For example, the Columbian Exposition half dollar, which Congress authorized on August, 5, 1892, was originally to have been designed by District of Columbia sculptor U.S.J. Dunbar. At the request of W.E. Curtis, a member of the Exposition's Board of Managers, Dunbar prepared a plaster model for the obverse based on the Lotto portrait of Columbus. However, after a few whispered directions from the Mint, the artist was quietly dismissed.

It was then decided that the Mint's chief engraver, Charles Barber, would copy the Columbus head on the recent Spanish-American medal by Enrique Lopez Lorensis. While awaiting the arrival of a bronze specimen from Madrid, Barber was asked to begin work using a Spanish newspaper cut of the medal, which Curtis had supplied. Apparently there was a premature announcement of the arrangement, for nothing else would explain why writers have traditionally referred to the 'Lopez' medal as the prototype of the Columbian half dollar. Had they ever seen the medal (which is extremely

rare), they would know that it is totally unlike the coin.

Available records do not indicate whether the medal actually arrived at the Mint. I am frankly skeptical, for though it was ordered through our minister at Madrid, it is not to be found in the Mint's own numismatic collection. On the other hand, there is another Spanish Columbian medal of the same date which bears a striking resemblance to the coin and could well have served as its prototype. This work is anonymous, and is shown, together with the Lopez-Lorensis medal, on the plate.

On September 9, 1892 Mint Director Leech sent to F.W. Peck, chairman of the Exposition's finance committee, two impressions illustrating different reverse designs. The first, ambiguously described as a 'bronze medal, showed a caravel and apparently the continent of North America, as suggested by Peck. Barber did not favor the design, and sent along with it a crude lead pattern depicting the Western Hemisphere. On the following day, Leech wrote to Peck:

Sir: Upon the receipt of your two communications of the 8th instant this morning. I telegraphed you as follows:

'Letter and package sent you yesterday, which fully answer your letters of the 8th instant. Letter by mail.'

As I have stated to Mr. Davis and Mr. Higinbotham, the Department will await your pleasure in the matter of the designs for the half dollar, and will adopt such designs as the officers of the Exposition finally agree upon provided they can be adapted to a coin the size of the half dollar.

In reply to your query as to whether the Western Continent will look reasonably well upon the coins, I would say that it is the opinion of the Engraver of the Mint at Philadelphia, with whom I have conferred on this subject, that the sketch of the Western Hemisphere sent you prepared by him with meridians, parallels and great circles will look reasonably well on the coin. You can form a very crude idea of how it will look from the lead sample sent you.

It is impossible for me to say at this date whether I will be able to be present on the occasion of the dedication ceremonies in Chicago next month, but it is my intention to be present if public business does not prevent. Respectfully yours.



Columbus medals (top), obverses by Enrique Lopez-Lorensis (left) and anonymous artist. (to right) Bottom: Columbian Exposition half dollar by Charles Barber and George T. Morgan. *An Illustrated History of U.S. Commemorative Coinage*, Don Taxay, p. 7.

From an editorial in the October 1892 issue of the *American Journal of Numismatics*, it would appear that the Board of Managers exercised considerable debate over the reverse design. The writer refers to newspaper clippings showing, respectively, 'the main building of the group at Chicago, with its large dome,' and 'an ocean scene, with three vessels sailing westward.'

Eventually, the Board decided upon a single caravel representing the Santa Maria. Directly below it were two hemispheres, and arrangement that subsequently caused jibes about the 'the ship on wheels.'

As finally submitted by the Board, the designs were in the advanced stage of plaster models. This seems to have angered Barber who, rightly or wrongly, pronounced the work uncoinable. He then returned to his own obverse model, and assigned the reverse to assistant engraver George T. Morgan. By mid-November the coinage was underway.

Although Barber's Columbus head is passably modeled, it is a lifeless composition. The fault is not so much a want of skill as the engraver's preoccupation with evenly distributed, flat relief for the sake of the dies. In a limited memorial issue, such niggardliness is especially unjustified. Barber must have realized his error, for he subsequently made a special attempt to heighten the relief on the Isabella quarter dollar. .

.⁵

"For a number of years now there has been controversy swirling around the striking of the first Columbian Exposition half dollar. . . After feeling they were slighted by the government, the Exposition Company decided they could still raise the needed funds if they marketed and sold the coins at a premium. Each Columbian Souvenir Coin (or Columbian Exposition half dollar as it was later called) was to be sold for 2X face value or \$1.00 each. At the suggestion of The Evening Post (Chicago) newspaper to generate publicity and further promote the sale of the coins, it was decided to offer the first strike to the highest bidder. The Post started the bidding war on August 10, 1892 with a \$50 bid. For the next two months, the Exposition Company was bombarded daily with ever increasing offers in increments of \$25 to \$50 until September 29th when it reached \$1,050 offered by the Western Electric Company. There it remained for a time. Finally on October 10th, 1892, as a publicity stunt, the firm of Wyckoff, Seamans & Benedict (who in 1886 purchased the typewriter business from E. Remington and Sons, later known as the Remington Typewriter Company) trumped all prior offers with their now famous \$10,000 bid. This substantial offer was to remain the highest price ever paid for a US coin until well into the 20th century.

On November 19, 1892, after months of preparation, it was time to begin minting of the souvenir coins at the Philadelphia mint. As one could imagine, there was great attention paid to the details of the much publicized first strike. After all, it was a staggering sum being offered for such a coin. There was no room for error or for disappointment to the Exposition Company or the buyer. It is therefore no surprise that security was at a maximum.

Much of the modern day controversy, however, originates from details surrounding this event. A story first came to light in the early 1980s that the well known coin collector James W. Ellsworth, also an Exposition Director, intentionally switched coins and the real first strike was actually the coin in an envelope marked No. 2 (one of the 104 proof strikes). This same pedigreed coin was documented as lot #127 in the Superior Auction Galleries sale on August 11, 1991 of the Larry Shepherd Collection of U.S. Commemorative Coinage. At the time of the sale, it too realized a staggering sum of \$14,300 (including the 10% buyer's fee) for the PCGS PR63 example. The reason it garnered such attention and such a final bid many believe is a result of this conjecture. Could it actually be the first strike of the Columbian Exposition half dollar rather than the one delivered to Wyckoff, Seamans & Benedict? If that were the case, this coin would clearly be more desired and valuable of the two.

After years of research, I believe that this controversy can finally be put to rest by using three irrefutable proofs. One involves the minute details found in the newspaper articles of the time, another involves the number of witnesses and Mint Superintendent Bosbyshell's signed and notarized affidavit, and the third is from promotional material distributed at the time of the fair attesting to the fact that the first strike was indeed the one delivered to the representative of Wyckoff, Seamans & Benedict. I therefore submit the following evidence for review:

⁵ *An Illustrated History of U.S. Commemorative Coinage*, Don Taxay, ARCO Publishing Co, Inc., New York, 1967, p. 3, 4, 8.

There are no official Mint records of the time, but several contemporary newspaper articles chronicled the event. A careful study of articles across the country shows that many of them had the same or similar wording, but were edited to fit the space and/or the audience. An oft quoted article, found in the November 20, 1892, Chicago Tribune newspaper, which is referenced in many of the detailed histories and descriptions of the Columbian half dollar is missing key details which are present in at least two New York papers. Following is an excerpt from the New York Times article published November 20, 1892 titled 'World's Fair Coinage Begun Yesterday at the Philadelphia Mint.' I have underlined those portions that are in the times article, but are not in the Chicago Tribune article. The articles are identical word for word other than the underlined portions.

' . . . The preparation for to-day's event had been a subject of great anxiety and interest to Superintendent Bosbyshell and his assistants for some time past, and this morning at 10 o'clock found all arrangements fully completed in accordance with carefully-prepared plans.

When the hour arrived Superintendent Bosbyshell was summoned to the pressroom by Chief Coiner William S. Steele, while engraver Charles Barber, who designed the famous coin; chief Clerk M. H. Cobb, and others assembled as witnesses. They gathered around an improved automatic, toggle-joined coining press, a noiseless, powerful, highly-polished, and wonderfully-accurate machine, which excites the admiration of all visitors.

Two dies, one bearing the impression to be stamped upon the obverse face and the other the reverse, and the only pair in existence, were already in place. Beside the press stood a receptacle containing hundreds of shining planchets – blank silver pieces, polished and milled, ready for stamping.

No power was applied to the machine for the first test. Instead, Foreman Albert Downing placed one of the planchets in the receiver and grasped the lever which raised the lower die, while Edwin Cliff, his assistant, stood at the balance wheel. Then came the critical moment.

In another second the blank coin, which might be worth \$10,000, or, if imperfect, about 35 cents, appeared. Unfortunately the first attempt was a failure. Just a little flaw in the planchet, or perhaps a little speck of dirt or grease smeared upon its face, caused the coin's rejection.

Cliff picked it carefully from the die – for such coins are not allowed to drop into the box beneath, lest they be marked by the fall. To an ordinary observer it might have appeared perfect, but the coiner and the designer examined it under a glass. One glance was enough.

A fatal flaw was revealed, and the verdict which consigned the prospective ten-thousand-dollar beauty to the scrap box was pronounced. A hammer was at hand, and which might have been the most famous coin in history was battered into comparatively worthless metal.

The next attempt was made more carefully for the reputation of the coiners was at stake, and they had resolved that the first souvenir of exposition should be a marvel of perfection and beauty.

The planchet, before being accepted, was examined under the microscope and found without blemish. For the second time the tow workmen turned the press by hand, while the spectators waited in suspense.

Again the coin was lifted from the face of the steel die and critically examined by Coiner Steele, Engraver Barber, and the Superintendent Bosbyshell. Every line was sharply defined, and the strong features of the discoverer of America, which adorn the face of the coin, seemed to look approvingly on the work. Columbus himself could not have done better, and Uncle Sam's reputation as an artist was vindicated. . .

This article and an identical one in the New York Herald, specifically state that the first coin struck with a defect was immediately destroyed using a hammer at hand.

Similarly, Mint Superintendent Bosbyshell (an eye witness to the event) signed and had notarized an affidavit that accompanied the coin as it journeyed to Chicago and the eventual buyer. This affidavit further confirms that this was the true first strike.

**MINT OF THE UNITED STATES AT PHILADELPHIA, PENN.
SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE, NOV. 19, 1892.**

I hereby certify that the souvenir coin in box marked No.1 was the first piece struck from the dies adopted for the Columbian half dollar, and sealed up in my presence and in the presence of the coiner, and delivered to Mr. James W. Ellsworth of the Columbian Exposition Directory.

O. C. BOSBYSHELL, Superintendent

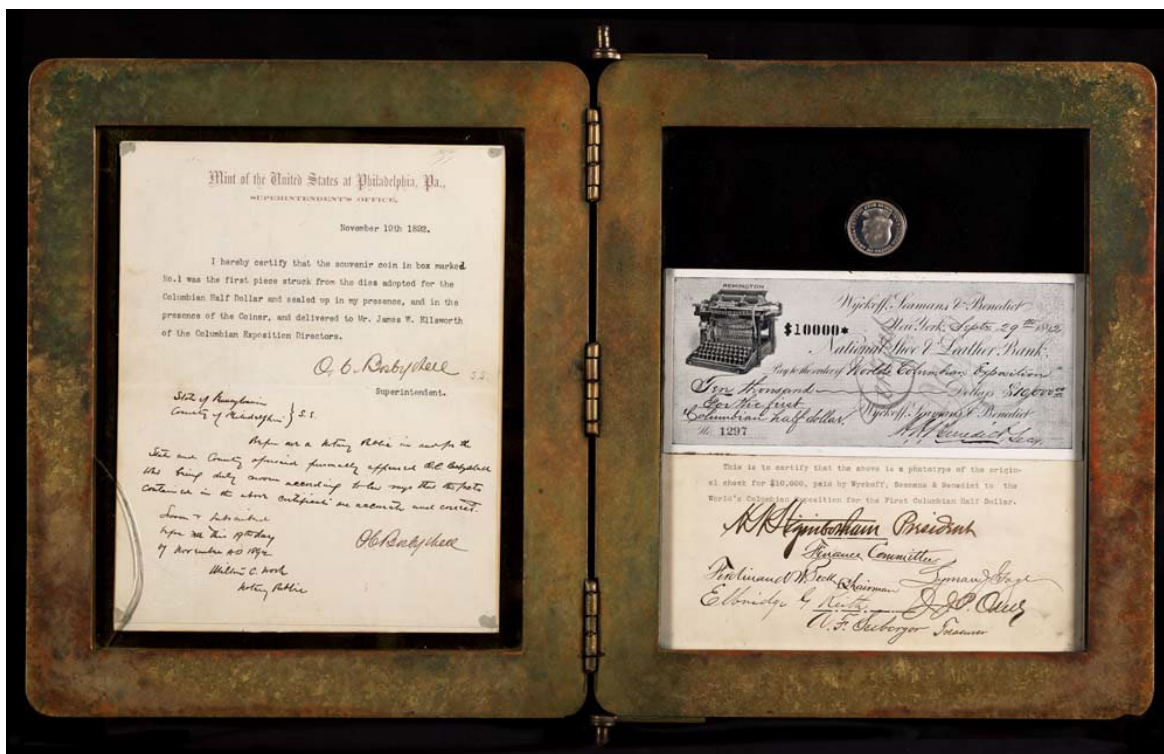
This affidavit is permanently enshrined with the accompanying coin in a sealed glass and brass case. See the photo courtesy of the Field Museum of Natural History.

Finally, we have an excerpt from a rare promotional piece given out to visitors of the Remington Typewriter exhibit in the northeast corner of the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building on the fairgrounds:

... Every precaution has been taken to preserve the identity of the coin. Accompanied by a sworn certificate from the superintendent of the mint, the coin came to Chicago carefully packed in a special box bearing the mint's seals. These seals were broken in the presence of witnesses representing both the exposition and the Remington Company. The coin was then enclosed in a temporary glass case, which was immediately sealed up and deposited in the presence of the same witnesses in a safety deposit vault, one key of which was held by the exposition company and the other by the typewriter company. **A few weeks ago the coin was removed from the vault and an expert from Spaulding's engraved a private mark on its face;** it was then placed in a permanent case composed of cast brass and plate glass. With it were locked up the several certificates; the case was then hermetically sealed, the key-holes cemented and the keys destroyed. . .

This piece of ephemera states that every precaution was taken to preserve the identity of the first strike. It also gives many details surrounding the heightened security in handling the coin from the Mint to the buyer.

In the end, the true No. 1 strike was securely delivered to representatives of the Wyckoff, Seamans & Benedict Company on December 19, 1892. It was carefully marked and then permanently sealed into a brass and glass case for display at the Exposition. At the close of the Fair, it was donated to the Field Columbian Museum in Chicago where it still resides in their vault. Like a good novel, the story of a possible switch by Ellsworth of the true first strike makes for good reading, but in the end it is still fiction. Nothing contrary to what was recorded at the time has been found to support such conjecture.”⁶



Front of the certifying letter and check for \$10,000 for the first coin minted, second coin struck, as the first had a minor planchet flaw. Purchased by The Remington Typewriter Company. Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum.

⁶ *The Commemorative Trail, the Journal for the Society for U.S. Commemorative Coins, Columbian Souvenir Coin First Strike* by Russell M. Frank, 2011, Vol. 28, No. 2 of 3.



Back of the certifying letter for the first coin minted, second coin struck, as the first had a minor planchet flaw. Purchased by The Remington Typewriter Company. Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum.



Obverse and reverse of the first Columbian Half Dollar coin issued for World's Columbian Exposition, 1893, from Philadelphia Mint. Obverse by Charles E. Barber; reverse by George T. Morgan; the designs taken from plaster models by Olin L. Warner. The following is from an email to the author: "So, as it claims to be the 'First' Columbian Half Dollar and the -encased coin + certificate we have in the folding case also claims it is the first tells me that this is indeed a close-up of that same coin. Also, the small ring of what appears to be plastic around the right-hand view of the coin looks very similar to- how it rests in the display. I hope this helps. Best Christine. Christine G. Museum Librarian & Head of Library Collections; Gantz Family Collections Center, Science & Education; *The Field Museum* in Chicago, Illinois.

"Take a chance meeting, an incomplete library index card, and a tattered newspaper, and you have the keys to unlock one of the numismatic mysteries of the decade.

One day early in March of this year, a man came to me at my work in Chicago and asked if there were any coin shows in the area in the immediate future. I told him that the next show of import in the area was the P.N.G. show to be held in October. Then I became curious and said, 'Why do you ask?'

He said, 'First, I should identify myself,' and he handed me a card reading: 'E. Leland Webber, Director, Field Museum of Natural History.' Immediately I was interested!

'We found something at the Museum that might be of interest to collectors, and we would like to have it exhibited at a show.'

'Oh? What's that?' I asked.

'The first Columbian Half Dollar!' was his reply.

Needless to say, this was a surprise and I became even more interested. I asked him just what it would take to have it placed on exhibit at the P.N.G. Show in the Fall.

He replied, 'Well, mainly three things. First, that it has adequate protection while outside the Museum. Second, that the Museum get adequate recognition in the publicity concerning the exhibit. And the third is probably the most unusual and the most important; that is, that the coin is not now, nor ever will be, on display at the Museum. The coin is not a part of our regular collections. It is a part of the 'accumulated memorabilia' that all museums have. We feel, however, that such an item would be of interest to collectors.'

I assured him that we could undoubtedly meet all of these requirements, and that I was going to be at the Museum in a few weeks and would like to make any additional preparation that might be necessary, and also to see the coin.

A few weeks later I made an appointment with Mr. Webber and went to the Field Museum to see the coin. When I arrived, Mr. Webber was just preparing to leave town, so he turned me over to Mr. Norman Nelson, the business manager of the Museum. I mentioned to him that I had come to see the First Columbian Half Dollar. He told me to be seated while he went down to the vault to get the coin. When he returned, he asked me to step into the next room to look at it.

As I stepped into the room, I saw a wooden box about 2 feet wide, perhaps 3 feet long, and about 8 inches thick, and it seemed to me that this was a very large package for one little coin to come in. Inside the box was a heavy brass frame that opened like a book exposing four sides. On the first page was the following document:

'The undersigned testify that on the nineteenth day of December, 1892, we witnessed the breaking of the original sealed package from the mint, in which was enclosed the box marked 'No. 1', containing the First Columbian Half Dollar and the sworn certificate of the Superintendent of the Mint; and witnessed further the delivery of the said coin and certificate to Wyckoff, Seamans and Benedict, by Mr. H. N. Higinbotham, President of the Worlds' Columbian Exposition.

And we further testify that the identical coin was immediately enclosed in the accompanying glass case, and in our presence sealed up.'

This document was signed by 19 administrators of the Columbian Exposition Commission.

On the second page of the frame was a document written on stationery from the Mint of the United States at Philadelphia, Pa., from the Superintendent's Office, dated November 19, 1892, which read as follows:

'I hereby certify that the souvenir coin in box marked No. 1 was the first piece struck from the dies adopted for the Columbian Half Dollar, and sealed up in my presence, and in the presence of the Coiner, and delivered to Mr. James W. Ellsworth, of the Columbian Exposition Directors.'

This was signed by the Superintendent, O. C. Bosbyshell, and duly notarized by William C. Work below the body of the letter.

On the third page, in between the sealed glass panels, was the coin — the first 1892 Columbian Half Dollar — the first United States Commemorative coin — a brilliant proof. With it on that page was a phototype of the \$10,000 check paid by Wyckoff, Seamans and Benedict, on behalf of the Remington Typewriter Company, to purchase this first coin, and below were the signatures of H. N. Higinbotham and five members of the Finance Committee.

On the fourth page was another typewritten letter, this one by the manager of a safety deposit vault in Chicago, dated June 5, 1893:

'I hereby (certify) that the temporary sealed glass case containing the First Columbian Half Dollar was deposited in safety deposit drawer #6384 in our vault, in the presence of H. N. Higinbotham representing the World's Columbian Exposition, and Mr. John F. McClain representing Wyckoff, Seamans and Benedict, on the nineteenth day of December, 1892, since which date the said drawer has never been opened until the fifth day of June, 1893, when in my presence and in the presence of the witnesses signed below, the identical sealed glass case was removed from drawer # 6384, and in my presence and in the presence of the witnesses signed below, the seals were broken, the glass case was opened, the coin removed, *a private mark was engraved upon the face of it*, and the same identical coin was then placed, with the certificate of the mint and other documents testifying to its identity, between the plate glass sheets of the accompanying case. The glass leaves were then cemented together, and then securely cemented to the framework, the frames locked, and the keys destroyed, and the keyholes filled up.' The signatures of the witnesses are below that of the vault manager.

As you noticed in the preceding document, 'a small private mark was engraved upon the face of it.' I was concerned about this because I thought an otherwise flawless coin might have been damaged. It came to mind also that if this coin were displayed, people would be searching for the mark and it would be wise to know its location. So I took out my magnifying glass and went over the face of the coin very carefully. *Only after long searching and looking did I find what I presumed to be the private mark. In the triangle formed by the bottom of Columbus' hair, the back of his neck and the collar of his garment, was a small nick as if someone had taken the point of a jackknife and made the mark.*

And that was the private mark put, on June 5, 1893, in the most inconspicuous spot that one could imagine!

Next I asked Mr. Nelson if this piece had ever been on exhibit anywhere. He stepped to the telephone and called the exhibit department. He asked for a particular gentleman, and after a brief talk he hung up and said 'I just spoke to a man in our exhibit department who last month (February, 1967) celebrated his 49th year with the Museum. He says unequivocally that the coin has never been exhibited since he has been with the Museum.' This then took care of nearly 50 of the 75 years that have elapsed since the coin was made.

As I left the Museum, I began to ponder as to where one might get additional information about the First Columbian Half Dollar. It seemed reasonable to presume that because Chicago was the location of the Columbian Exposition, other facts were available here in the city. And then it came to me, of course, the Chicago Historical Society.

Upon arriving at the Society, I went to the library. There I explained to a young man that I was looking for information concerning the Columbian Exposition, and specifically the making of the first Columbian Exposition Half Dollars. He showed me that there were several file drawers of cards on the Exposition, and he offered to select a few that might be more closely related to my interest. He came up with about three cards that alluded to the Half Dollars. One read: 'The first Columbian Half Dollar given to H. N. Higinbotham, president of the World's Columbian Exposition.' I was surprised at this because I was under the impression the first Columbian Half Dollar was sold to the Remington Typewriter Company for \$10,000.

I asked the young man where I could find more information about what it said on the card. He said that information would be in the authority file downstairs and that we would have to go down there. I assured him I was very interested, and we went downstairs together. We arrived at a first floor office and made our quest known.

One of the ladies in the office directed us to the authority file and began looking for the items that would verify the library index card. After a time the Society curator, Mr. Joseph Zywicki, came in and helped to look for the folder we were seeking. After a few more minutes had passed the file folder was found and gave forth its incredible data. The startling bit of information that we got from the file was not that Mr. Higinbotham had been given the first Columbian Half Dollar, but that he had been given the first 1893 Columbian Half Dollar, and that that coin was in possession of the Chicago Historical Society!

This then, presented another interesting possibility – the possibility of exhibiting both Columbian Half Dollars – the first 1892 and the first 1893 together, probably for the first time in history.

It came to me then that with the discovery of both these 'firsts' it might be interesting to write an article about these coins and get more information. With this idea in mind I returned to the library and asked the young man if they had any old newspapers.

I already knew that the first coin was minted November 19, 1892, and it seemed reasonable to presume that with transportation and communication being what they were in that day, it was unlikely that the news would get in the papers on the same day, but possibly the next day.

I was directed to a room that was lined with shelves containing bound newspapers dating well back into the 19th century. I looked in the area where the Chicago Tribune was filed and started looking for November 20, 1892. I found the proper edition and laid it out on the table. Nothing on the first page, nothing on the second page, nothing on the third page. But on page 4, column 1, was the whole story of the striking of the first Columbian Half Dollars.

(continued in the July issue)"⁷

"(*The Centinel*, continued from the April issue)

The headlines read: 'The First Coins Minted – Prize World's Fair Souvenirs Turned Out at Philadelphia – The Second Attempt Results in the Production of the Perfect Coin – There was a Large Gathering of Distinguished People Present, Philadelphia, Pa., Nov 19 – (Special). – It was a \$10,000 beauty that dropped today from the coin press at the United States Mint when the work of coining the Columbian Half Dollar began. Supt. Bosbyshell was on hand to represent the Government, and James W. Ellsworth of the World's Fair commission represented that body. There was great interest manifested in the affair because of the big premiums that have been offered for certain of the coins. In addition to the first one, there were also coined and delivered to Mr. Ellsworth the 400th, 1492nd, and 1892nd coins of the new Half-dollars.

'Over two thousand of the souvenirs were struck today and the work will continue until all of the 5,000,000 donated by Congress are completed.

With the exception of the four valuable coins already specified, the remainder will be held at the Mint until order for their disposal are received from the Treasury Department. The work of coining the souvenirs will not be finished much before the opening of the Exposition in May, next.

'When the hour arrived, Supt. Bosbyshell was summoned to the pressroom by Chief Coiner William S. Steele, while Engraver Charles Barber, who designed the famous coin, Chief Clerk M. N. Cobb, and others, assembled as witnesses. Two dies, one bearing the impression to be stamped upon the obverse face, and the other the reverse, and the only pair in existence, were already in place. Foreman Albert Downing placed one of the blank planchets in the receiver and grasped the lever which raises the lower die, while Edwin Cliff, his assistant, stood at the balance wheel. Unfortunately, the first attempt was a failure – a little flaw caused the coin's rejection.

'The next attempt was made more carefully for the reputation of the coiners was at stake and they had resolved that the first approved souvenir of the Exposition should be a marvel of perfection and beauty. The planchet, before being accepted, was examined under the microscope and found without a blemish. For the second time, the two workmen turned the press by hand, while the spectators waited in suspense. Again the coin was lifted from the face of the steel die and critically examined by Coiner Steele, Engraver Barber, and superintendent Bosbyshell. Every line was sharply defined, and the strong features of the discoverer of America, which adorn the coin, seemed to look approvingly on the work. Columbus himself could not have done better, Uncle Sam's reputation as an artist was vindicated.

'Cardboard boxes had been prepared for the reception of the coins, much like those in which pills are sold. No finger touched the first of the souvenirs, but the pliers gently clutched it by the rim and conveyed the \$10,000 lump to the box which was immediately sealed and handed to the World's Fair Commissioner.'

The following certificate accompanied the coin: 'MINT OF THE UNITED STATES AT PHILADELPHIA, Superintendent's Office, Nov 19, 1892. I hereby certify that the souvenir coin in box marked No. 1 was the first piece struck from the dies adopted for the Columbian Half Dollar and sealed up in my presence and in the presence and in the presence of the coiner, and delivered to Mr. James W. Ellsworth of the Columbian Exposition directory.

⁷ *The Centinel*, official publication of the Central States Numismatic Society (CSNS); *The Resurrection of the First Columbian Half Dollar*, by William A. Pettitt, CSNS #1782, Entrant in the 1968-69 Elston Bradfield Literary Competition, Volume 15, Number 3, April 1968, p. 16-19.

I hereby certify that the souvenir coin in box marked No. 1 was the first piece struck from the dies adopted for the Columbian Half Dollar and sealed up in my presence and in the presence and in the presence of the coiner, and delivered to Mr. James W. Ellsworth of the Columbian Exposition directory.

O. W. Bosbyshell, Supt.'

After the delivery of the first coin the foreman and his assistant continued by hand until they had struck 100 proof pieces, occupying about an hour in the task. Power was then applied, and the actual work of making 5,000,000 half dollars went rapidly ahead.

'The new half dollars bear the portrait of Columbus according to Lotto upon one side, while upon the other is the discoverer's caravel, the Santa Maria, in full sail. Beneath the vessel is the date 1492 and the two supporting hemispheres representing the Old and the New World. The motto 'In God We Trust,' and the date 1892 are the remaining details.

'Commissioner Ellsworth will take back with him most of the coins for which fancy prices have been offered. The entire mintage will be shipped to Chicago and disposed of from that city. The coin was designed by Morgan (reverse, Barber obverse), an Englishman, the same who planned the dollar of the daddies. The sum of \$1,000 is to be paid the Columbian Commission for the first half dollar, and it was for that reason that Mr. Ellsworth witnessed the coining. He will make affidavit to what he saw.

The most shocking item in the article was that the piece that I had seen at the Field Museum was not the first Columbian Half Dollar! As it states in the article, the first one was imperfect, and we can presume that if for no other reason than shame the coin was thrown back into the melting pot to disappear forever, and that the one I had seen was the first perfect 1892 Columbian Half Dollar. Another piece of unbelievable luck was that one of the documents in the brass frame was quoted verbatim in the newspaper article. From the standpoint of a researcher, this is the kind of luck one can only dream about.

After the newspaper find I returned to the curator's office and asked him if I could make arrangements to see the 1893 Columbian Half. He said it could be arranged at some future date, and that there were other items with the coin. I thanked him for his efforts, and left.

A week or so later, I returned to the Field Museum to make arrangements to have the documents and the brass frame photographed. I told Mr. Nelson I would like to get some photos, if possible, to illustrate an article that I was preparing. He stepped to the phone and called up to the Photography Department. A few moments later Mr. Holden, of the department, arrived and asked what photos were needed. I said, 'One of the frame, one of each of the documents, and a close-up of each side of the coin. They need not be large because space may be limited when the article appears. He said, 'We'll make them 8 x 10 so they'll be able to see them. They can always be reduced.' I was sure he knew more about his business than I, so I quickly agreed.

While I was still there, Mr. Nelson mentioned that he had found something that, although not directly related to my project might be of some interest. It seems that the Field Museum was originally called the Field Columbian Museum, and had as its attractions numerous items associated with the Columbian Exposition. What Mr. Nelson brought out was the first ticket sold at the Museum on June 4, 1894, and the coin that had purchased it. The coin was an 1854 quarter in very average condition. These items had been kept by the Museum since that day in 1894. After this, I thanked the gentlemen for their cooperation and proceeded to other things.

The next item of importance was to make an appointment with the director of the Chicago Historical Society, Mr. Clement Sylvestro, and ask him if it would be possible to borrow the 1893 Columbian Half Dollar to display with the 1892. I made the appointment for a Friday morning, and also made arrangements with Mr. Zywicki to see the coin.

On the designated Friday, I came in to Chicago and went out to the Chicago Historical Society. I arrived somewhat earlier than I had anticipated. I was to meet with Mr. Sylvestro at 10:30, and I was already there by 9:45. I felt this might give ample time to see the 1893 Columbian Half Dollar. I asked the girl at the desk if Mr. Zywicki was in yet. She said he was not, but was expected shortly. A few minutes after 10:00 he arrived, and I asked him if it would be possible for me to see the coin now. He said it would, and we went back to his office. He told me to be seated while he went to the vault to get the coin. I mentioned to him that he had said there were other things with the coin and that I would like to see them at this time also. (Having gone through the correspondence in the file at the Historical Society, I had inkling as to what those things might be.

The Mint of the United States at Philadelphia,
Superintendent's Office,

January 3rd 1893

I hereby certify that the Columbian Half Dollar sealed in a pasteboard box marked "Phila. Jan. 3/93. First Columbian Half-Dol struck in 1893 O. C. Bosbyshell Supt. Mint U.S. at Phila.", and this box enclosed in another pasteboard box with a strip of paper pasted over the seam thereof, and sealed, marked "No. 1. 1893," is the first Columbian Half Dollar struck from the dies of 1893, and was sealed by myself.

O. C. Bosbyshell
Superintendent.

A few minutes later Mr. Zywicki returned from the vault. He had three large envelopes and a small round box. The little box was like a pill box, and on top of it was written: 'No. 1, 1893' and it was sealed on the side with red wax with a small medal pressed into the wax. On the medal was a portrait of Superintendent O. C. Bosbyshell, and showed that he had sealed the box. Inside the first box was a second box. On top of this box it read: 'Phila. Jan 3/93, O. C. Bosbyshell, Supt. Mint U.S. at Phila.'

I opened this box and inside I saw cotton. I took the cotton away, and there was the first 1893 Columbian Half Dollar—a gray proof. The condition was the same as the 1892, except that this one, having been exposed to the air, had toned to a gray color. After picking it up by the edges and examining both obverse and reverse, I was satisfied that this was the coin I had been looking for. I then turned my attention to the three envelopes that had been brought along with the coin. (You will recall from the newspaper item it mentioned that the 400th, the 1492nd and the 1892nd had been put aside as special coins). As I looked at the envelopes, the first one I picked up read: '1492nd 1892 Columbian Half Dollar.' The second one read: '1892nd 1892 Columbian Half Dollar,' and the last one read: '400th 1892nd Columbian Half Dollar.' I was amazed that these pieces should also be here. But the biggest shock was yet to come.

On the back of each envelope was a red wax seal roughly the size of a silver dollar. Much to my surprise, these seals had never been broken! The coins had been sealed in the envelopes on November 19, 1892, and from that day to this, have never seen the light of day! A most unusual bit of numismatic history.

As I was looking at these coins, a gentleman came into the office and began conversing with Mr. Zywicki. I gathered from what was being said that the gentleman was the director, Mr. Sylvestro. After introductions, I mentioned that he need not be detained too long because the items to be discussed were right at hand. He agreed to sit for a moment and listen to my request. I told him that we had the co-operation of the Field Museum in getting the 1892 Columbian Half Dollar, and we were very interested in getting the 1893 to exhibit with it at the P.N.G Show in the Fall. I repeated to him the provisions for security and publicity that I had told Mr. Webber of the Field Museum. Mr. Sylvestro explained that there were several concerns in his mind concerning the lending of museum specimens, and especially the coin. As he went along, I was beginning to get the gist of what he was trying to tell me, so I thanked him for his time and that I understood his position, and that I would be leaving.

He said, 'Now just a minute, young man, I didn't say no!' This was quite surprising, but encouraging. He said, 'What I will need is a letter on your letterhead stating what you want, what the security and insurance arrangement are, and all the details. When I have this letter, I will take it up with the Board of Directors of the Chicago Historical Society.' I assured him that he would have all of this information within the week. After making final arrangements with Mr. Zywicki for the photographing of all the documents relevant to the coins, I left.

My concern now was to answer to the letter that was sent to Mr. Sylvestro (*sic*) about borrowing the coin. Then one day in July the letter came, and it stated that the Society would be happy to lend us the 1893 Columbian Half Dollar.

So, with the two coins exhibited at the P.N.G. Show numismatic history is being made. This is the first time—and possibly the last—that these coins have ever been exhibited together. Each participant and viewer will give this priority in their individual numismatic archives.

This, then, is the story of the discovery and exhibiting of the first 1892 and 1893 Columbian Half Dollars—the resurrection of the first Columbian Half Dollar.”⁸

“Handling Souvenir Coins:

We had the honor to be granted the privilege of photographing the Souvenir Coin Department of the Exposition and in the accompanying illustration (image above) we present to our readers a view of the Treasurer's office in which the Exposition Souvenir Coins are handled. The view shows the office in which the Exposition Souvenir Coins are handled. The view shows the office where the shipments of coins were received and were being delivered. The coins were received from the United States Mint, Philadelphia, in oak kegs. There were 10,000 coins in each keg. The keg shown in the photograph with a linen bag placed thereon is the one which contained the *first* coin, for which \$10,000 was paid.

When the kegs are first opened the coins are carefully counted to ascertain if the number agrees with the shipment receipts from the mint. They are then ready to be paid out to those who have placed their order and hold a certificate for the same. . .

Sitting between the tables is Mr. A. F. Seeberger, Treasurer of the World's Columbian Exposition. To Mr. Seeberger is due great credit in the able manner in which he has conducted this very responsible department of the Exposition. Indeed it is about the only department which can be said to have an unquestionable record. In the management of his work Mr. Seeberger receives very efficient assistance from his secretary, Mr. D. H. Lamberson, who may be seen in the picture standing directly behind Mr. Seeberger. Mr. A. B. Hush, head cashier of the Souvenir Coin Department, stands at his left. Much credit is due Mr. Hush for his skill and accuracy, as the first mistake is yet to occur in the handling of the coins. Mr. L. Udeman, chief clerk, stands by his side. Did space permit we could speak equally as well as the other able assistants to whom the responsible task of handling these precious metals has been entrusted. The coins, although costing one dollar, are given gratuitously with a subscription to this journal and can be had by addressing the publisher, J. B. Campbell, 159 Adams Street, Chicago, Ill.”⁹

⁸ *The Centinel, Official Publication of the Central States Numismatic Society (C.S.N.S.)*, The Resurrection of the First Columbian Half Dollar, by William A. Pettit, #1782, Entrant 1968-69 Elston Bradfield Literary Competition, July 1968, Vol. 15, #4, p. 15-19.

⁹ *The World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated*, Vol. II, March 1892 to March 1893, p. 276.



COUNTING SOUVENIR COINS IN THE TREASURER'S OFFICE OF THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPCITION.

Counting souvenir coins in the Treasurer's Office of the World's Columbian Exposition. Courtesy of *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated, Handling Souvenir Coins*, Vol. II, 1893, p. 276.



ANTHONY F. SEEBERGER,
Treasurer of the Exposition.

Courtesy of *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893. By Authority of the Board of Directors*, p. 26.

Proof Columbian Half Dollars:

"My new Columbian Half. Kinda wondering what you might think. (Physics-fan3.14.comment)

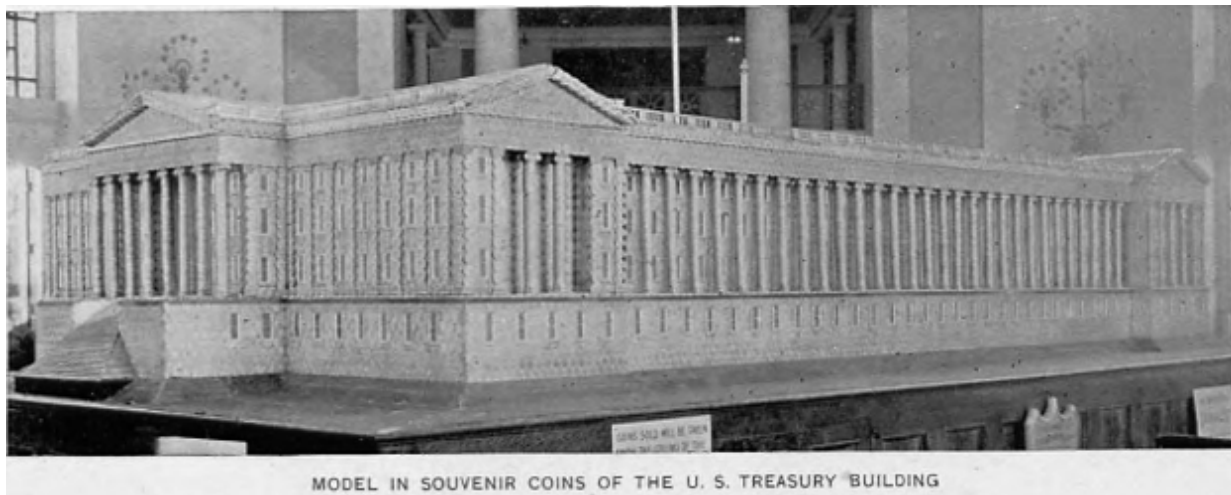
'No real Columbian half proofs were made.' However, a bunch were struck from polished dies at the request of the sponsor. Same for the quarter. In both instances the Engraver specifically stated they are not proofs. RWB comment on 01/03/05, Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC) Coin Forum.

It is my understanding that none of the major TPG's (Third Party Grading Companies) will call any Columbian half or Isabella quarter a proof anymore. CaptHenway comment on 01/03/05, Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC) Coin Forum."¹⁰

"At the January 1994 FUN Show, the author presented a rationale, some logic, and detailed calculations establishing disposition numbers of the 5 million 1892 and 1893 Columbian halves.

¹⁰ Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC), U.S. Coin Forum, Discussion concerning Columbian Proof Half Dollars, 01/03/05.

Authors Breen-Swiatkek, Bowers, and Slabaugh agree that approximately 2.5 million of the Columbian halves were melted and that a substantial number (between 1.14 and 1.4 million) were never issued by the U.S. Mint to the Columbian Expo Commission.



Courtesy of Bancroft, Hubert Howe, The Book of the Fair, Volume 1. Chicago: The Bancroft Company, 1893.

Two key exhibits at the Columbian World Exposition in 1893 at Chicago, Illinois, provided the basis for determining the approximate disposition of all the Columbian halves. (The Exposition did not officially open until May 1, 1893).

In the first exhibit a large number of the halves were used to create the external façade of a scaled replica of the Washington Monument, and in the second exhibit an even larger number of the halves were used to surface a scaled replica of the U.S. Treasury Building.

The Washington Monument replica was approximately 20 feet tall, which by symmetry translates to an approximate 2-feet-by-2-feet base. The Washington Monument is 555 feet high with a 55-feet-by-55-feet base. The author's calculations indicated that approximately 167,000 Columbian halves were used in the Washington Monument replica.

The U.S. Treasury Building replica, located in the rotunda of the Expo's Administration Building, is pictured below. The model was 18 feet long, 9-1/2 feet wide and 3 feet high.

Calculations indicate that approximately 792,000 Columbian halves were used in the U.S. Treasury Building replica.

The number of Columbian halves used in the two replicas total approximately 960,000 pieces.

With the derivation of the approximate 960,000 number, the apparently different numbers used by the three other authors noted previously are not only reconciled but are easily explained by assuming each author took a different time and location snapshot of the whereabouts of the Columbian halves.

Taking Slabaugh's data that 400,000 of the 1893 Columbians were not sold and that 1,141,760 were withheld by the Mint, a total of 1,541,760 would be available for minting. Logically, the 960,000 used in the replica would not be available for sale until after the Expo closed, making them likely candidates for melting. Bowers indicates that all 950,000 of the 1892 halves sold (which is logical since 1892 is the 500th anniversary year) and that 450,000 of the 1893 halves sold. This provides an accounting for 3,901,760 of the coins.

Using Swiatek-Breen data, 950,000 of the 1892 halves sold, 1,141,760 were withheld by the Mint, and 1,359,940 of the 1893 halves were melted. This group totals 3,451,700. Missing in the Swiatek-Breen numbers is the number of 1893 halves sold. Again using Bowers' number of 450,000 for the 1893 halves sold, the total is 3,901,700, again approximating the 3,901,760 derived above.

What happened to the approximately 1.1 million 1893 halves remaining? All authors agree that banks loaned money to the Columbian Expo and that Columbian halves were held as collateral. Again logic prevails. The Expo's being over, there was no outlet for the bank-held coins; and shipping them to the Mint would incur costs, so the most logical disposition would be a simple release of 1.1 million 1893 halves into circulation. Such is this author's conclusion.

The key to determining the disposition of the Columbian halves (which was derived first) lies in the calculated number of halves used in the two replicas. Summarizing in chart form, we obtain:

Disposition of the Columbian Halves

1892 Sold (all of them)	950,000
1893 Sold (Bowers)	450,000
1893 Unsold (Slabaugh) (melted)	400,000*
1893 Withheld by Congress & U.S. Mint (melted)	1,141,760
1893 Used in Replicas (melted)	960,000*
1893 Released by Banks into Circulation (remaining)	1,098,240*
Total	5,000,000

* All three figures with an asterisk are accepted by the author as close approximations.

It can be seen from the above that the reports by Slabaugh, Swiatek-Breen, and Bowers are all undoubtedly correct and are easily reconciled by the derived numbers.

For the first time a number is placed on the quantity of Columbian halves held as collateral and later released into circulation by the banks involved. The analysis also provides a rationale for determining which groups of coins were melted.”¹¹

¹¹ *The Commemorative Trail, the Journal for the Society for U.S. Commemorative Coins*, Disposition of the 5 Million Columbian Commemorative Half Dollars by Frank W. DuVall (LM-001, AL). Fall/Winter – 1996, Volume 14 - #1 & #2.

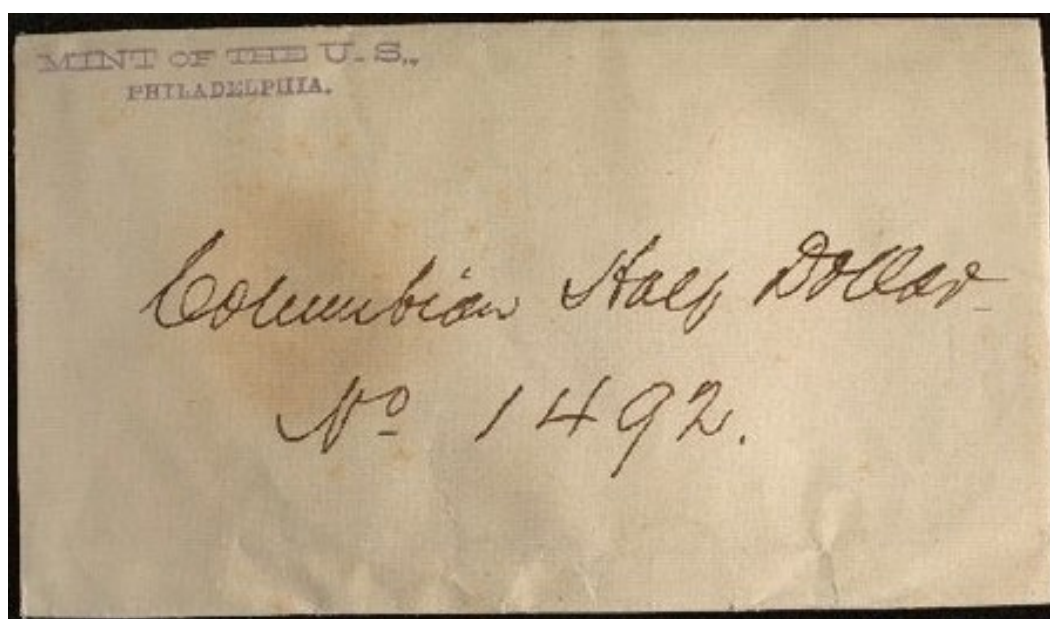
Columbian Half Dollars from *The Chicago History Museum*



i85806 IPTC envelope, i85804 IPTC (left) and i85805 IPTC (right) – Headline: World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin, and ICHI 085822 coin holder. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



i85808 (left) and i85809 IPTC – Headline: World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



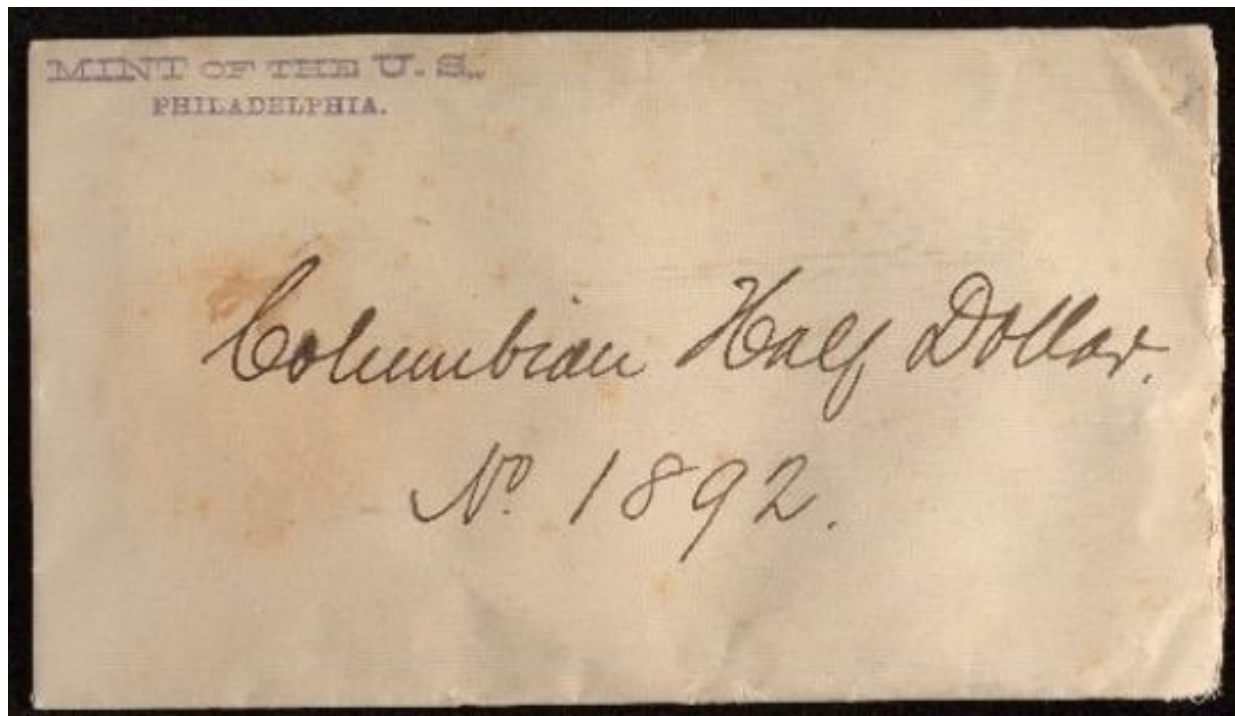
i85810 IPTC – Headline: Envelope holder of World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



i85811 IPTC – Headline: Envelope holder of World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



i85812 (left) and i85813 IPTC – Headline: World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



i85814 IPTC – Headline: Envelope holder of World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



i85815 IPTC – Headline: Envelope holder of World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



i85816 (left) and i85817 IPTC – Headline: World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



i85818 (left) and i85819 IPTC – Headline: World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.



i85820 (left) and i85821 IPTC – Headline: World's Columbian Exposition half dollar coin. Courtesy *Chicago History Museum*.

“The Wells Fargo ‘Keepsake’ Coin

Our President, Anthony Swiatek, was kind enough to send in some fascinating photographs and letters concerning the Wells, Fargo & Company and the ‘Keepsake’ Columbian Half they offered to their employees in the beginning of 1893. We all owe him a big ‘thank you’ for his thoughtfulness and I would like to encourage ALL of our readers to contact us if they have ANY unusual paperwork that they would like to share with the membership. After your property has been reproduced, it will be returned to you unharmed, I promise! Just make sure to contact us BEFORE you ship anything.

Anthony obtained this information with the gallant efforts of Diane A. Piret (Member #415, TX) and in a letter to our fearless leader she made the following comments:

‘Enclosed are photocopies of letters received today from the historian at Wells Fargo Bank regarding the Columbian Expo piece. Apparently, these were done at the beginning of 1893 and this particular specimen is complete with all the documentation that was originally done.’

‘I have spoken with Robert Chandler, the Wells Fargo Historian, (Ed. Note: see the reproduction of his reply on page 33), and while he hasn’t precise records, he feels that W.F. & Co. had perhaps a total of 3,000 employees at that time. (Ed. Note: I doubt if EVERYONE of the employees exercised their option of ordering one, so this figure should be considered the MAXIMUM amount of sets issued! Personally, I would imagine the actual number ISSUED to be much lower than 3,000). It seems that Wells Fargo had more than just a casual interest in the Expo – they had an exhibit and bought their first parade coach for the event! Mr. Chandler said that we would have permission to reprint the official 1893 memo (Ed. Note: see page 34) if proper credit were given. . .’

‘They have an example among their historical treasures also dated 1892 – It seems no sets were made with 1893 coins.’¹²

¹² *the Commemorative Trail*, The newsletter of the Society of U.S. Commemorative Coins. The Wells Fargo ‘Keepsake’ Coin. July, 1985, p. 32-34.



the Commemorative Trail, July, 1985, p. 32.

WELLS FARGO BANK
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

HISTORY DEPARTMENT (921)
475 SANSOME STREET
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94111
(415) 396-4157

March 19, 1985

Diane Piret
P.O. Box 7
Belle Chasse, LA 70037

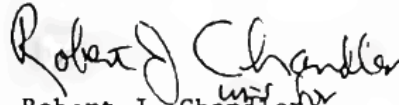
Dear Ms. Piret:

This is in response to your letter of March 12 seeking information on your Wells Fargo Columbian half dollar.

The enclosed copy of an official Wells, Fargo & Co. circular, sent by president John J. Valentine to Agent Connell of Hutchinson, Kansas explains the background. Yours is a very fine specimen with all of its documentation. The seals show that Wells Fargo Superintendent C.W. Stockton in Kansas City issued it.

I am returning your photographs.

Sincerely,


Robert J. Chandler
Research Historian

RJC/mbg
Enclosure

JOHN J. VALENTINE, President, San Francisco.
W. F. LEVAD, First Vice President, San Francisco.
DUDLEY EVANS, Second Vice President, New York.
JAMES HERRON, Secretary, San Francisco.
H. B. PARSONS, Assistant Secretary, New York.
H. WADSWORTH, Treasurer, San Francisco.

Wells, Fargo & Company,

Express and Banking,

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT.

SAN FRANCISCO, January 2, 1893.

TO EMPLOYEES OF

WELLS, FARGO & COMPANY'S EXPRESS.

GENTLEMEN:

Wishing to aid in perpetuating a pleasant recollection of the great commemorative event of the present year, to wit, the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago, Illinois, and to secure at the same time a little remembrance of our friendly interest in you individually, in appreciation of your faithful services, we have arranged to present each employé a specimen of the Souvenir Coin, of which the government at Washington has coined five millions to promote the success of the celebration. The coins are designed simply as souvenirs or keepsakes, and as such will, it is thought, enhance in value from year to year. It is in this spirit our presentation is made, with the hope that as a token of our regard they will be prized and preserved.

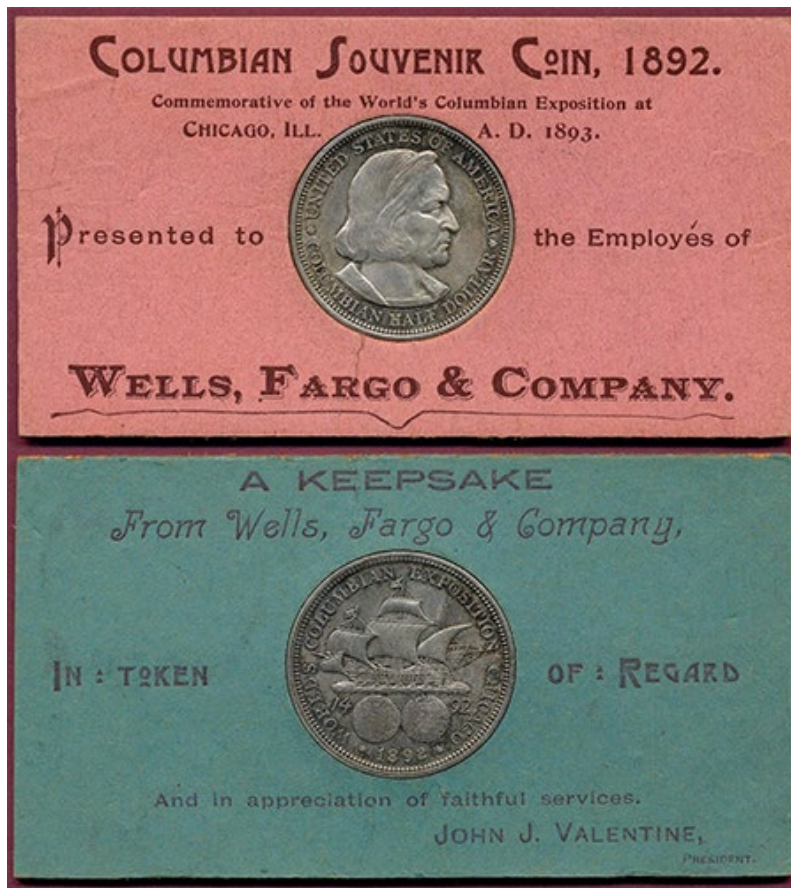
The distribution of these coins, which are now ready, will be made through Superintendents and Route Agents of the Company, to whom please apply for one in writing (Office Agents, for themselves and Employés, to the Superintendent; and Messengers, etc., to the Route Agent) giving name, occupation and address. Prompt attention will facilitate the distribution.

Wishing one and all a happy and prosperous New Year, I am,

Very truly,


President.

WELLS FARGO BANK CO.
This material is for the
only and may be used.



Wells Fargo Company coin holder. Courtesy of Coinweek.



Wells Fargo Company coin holder envelope. Courtesy of Coinweek.

“ . . . In addition to individual coin sales to fairgoers, the Exposition also made bulk sales to companies wishing to use the coins for promotional purchases. One such bulk purchaser was Wells, Fargo & Company who turned their purchase into one of the Exposition's more interesting pieces of coin-related collectible ephemera.

The famed company was organized in 1852 by Henry Wells, William G. Fargo and others in response to the immense profit potential of the burgeoning California mineral industry. The company was capitalized with a \$300,000 investment from its organizers and was initially structured to offer banking and express shipping services in California. It quickly established offices in all of the state's mining camps of significance and became the dominant provider of its services.

From these roots, the company continued to grow and expand its geographic reach. By the time of the Columbian Exposition in 1893, it had grown to include 2,829 offices located across the United States along with agents in England, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Panama. Over 6,000 employees enabled the company to conduct its business over 36,000 miles of railroads, stagecoach roads and water routes. Wells Fargo handled a significant amount of transport of goods to and from the Exposition.

Ever aware of its history and role in supporting the development of the American West, Wells Fargo launched its first-ever historical exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition; it was located in the California Building. The exhibit featured a collection of more than 200 historical artifacts. Featured were photographs of company employees and offices, signs and posters used to promote its business and various noteworthy pieces of company correspondence. Also featured were 'Cut-off' shotguns used by company employees to defend their shipments and a shotgun used by the infamous outlaw 'Black Bart' (real name: Charles E. Boles) who robbed Wells Fargo stagecoaches 28 different times!

For numismatists, of note is exhibit item number 167. It is listed as 'A Keepsake' and is described as an 1892 'Columbian Souvenir Coin' presented along with its display card and a copy of the letter President John J. Valentine sent to employees regarding the coin.

In his January 2, 1893 letter, Valentine announced that the company had purchased a quantity of the Columbian half dollars and would be presenting each employee with a 'Souvenir Coin' as an 'aid in perpetuating a pleasant recollection of the great commemorative event of the present year, to wit, the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago, Illinois, and to secure at the same time a little remembrance of our friendly interest in you individually, in appreciation of your faithful services.'

Valentine continued, 'The coins are designed simply as souvenirs or keepsakes, and as such will, it is thought, enhance in value from year to year. It is in this spirit our presentation is made, with the hope that as a token of our regard they will be prized and preserved.'

To receive a coin, employees applied to either their Superintendent or Route Agent; Office Agents and their reports were to request coins via their Superintendent, Messengers were to apply through their Route Agent.

The coins were distributed in custom-printed card board holders that allowed both sides of the coin to be seen. The front of the card was pink in color and featured descriptive text regarding the coin's commemorative nature and noted its intent as a presentation piece. The back of the card was green and featured a message from John J. Valentine: 'A Keepsake from Wells, Fargo & Company. / In Token of Regard / And in appreciation of faithful services.'

The holder was inserted in a pre-printed envelope which left space for the recipient's name and title to be added, along with their home office location. The envelope also made note of the coin's value at \$1.00 to further support the piece's value over its face denomination.

The coin and presentation card were not available for sale to the general public. The Wells Fargo archives indicate that 1,666 of the coins in the presentation holders were distributed to employees, with 124 applied for coins left undistributed for unidentified reasons. Clearly, not all of the company's 6,000 employees applied for one of the coins when they had the chance.

In 1909, an internal memo notes that 600 coins still on hand were sold to multiple parties in group lots at just a cent or two over face value. This suggests that the company likely purchased approximately 2,500 of the coins at the time of the Exposition.

Unlike many of the commemorative coins that would follow it, especially those from the 1930s, the Columbian half dollars were not sold by their sponsor in any type of special packaging.

For collectors seeking such pieces of commemorative ephemera to enhance their collections, holders such as this piece from Wells Fargo are the next best thing to an 'official' holder from the sponsor."¹³

Cornelius Vermeule writes: "The First Commemorative Coins:

The epic year 1892 also marked the appearance of the first commemorative coin, the half dollar issued to celebrate the World's Columbian Exposition of 1892 and 1893 in Chicago. The designs were overt products of the medallic academicism fostered by the officials of the Mint in Philadelphia, the obverse being the work of Charles Barber (portrait design by J.Q.A. Ward) and the reverse the creation of George Morgan. The total effect was one of dignity and, considering what had appeared for so long on the gold and silver coinage up to 1892, novelty of types. From the start controversy raged about the alleged portrait of Columbus on the obverse, and the reverse stirred considerable emotion, for the *Santa Maria* appears to be gliding on the two hemispheres as if they were giant tires (fig. 103). Arlie Slabaugh has written with his customary wit, 'The design received considerable criticism from the public, some suggesting that the portrait was not Columbus but Daniel Webster or Henry Ward Beecher. . .[Y]ou can take the portrait on any coin and someone will resemble it. Just as movie stars have 'doubles.' The only solution is to stop using people on coins.'⁴ At least it was a giant step forward to have produced a regular coin with someone other than Liberty on it, however controversial the portrait of the Admiral of the Ocean Seas might have been.

Sources for the Columbus have been given variously as the medal struck in Madrid to commemorate the same 400th anniversary, a statue in that same city, and Lorenzo Lotto's painting of a learned man identified as the Navigator. Complaining about the low relief of the coin, a critic wrote in the 1893 *American Journal of Numismatics*: As a work of art it is certainly a great disappointment. . . The beardless face serves to show which side of the discussion concerning his whiskers the Mint authorities have taken, and they are evidently free from the uncertainty which has pervaded the Post Office Department, and evoked so much amusing comment on the special issue of Postage stamps.⁵ Three issues later the same journal seems to have settled the problem in its own mind by stating about the painting signed by Lorenzo Lotto: 'This portrait served as the model for the face of Columbus upon the souvenir Half Dollars, and was awarded a silver medal at the Columbian Historical Exposition at Madrid, as being the most authentic likeness of the Discoverer.'⁶ Both this likeness of 1512 (fig. 104) and the plumper one painted by Sebastiano del Piombo are thought to be copied after the sketch of an artist working in Rome about 1500."¹⁴

¹³ Commemorative Stories: The 1892-93 Columbian Half Dollars by David Provost, January 15, 2016. Courtesy of *Coinweek*.

⁴ Slabaugh, 12.

⁵ 'The Columbian Half Dollar,' *AJN* 27 (1893): 65.

⁶ 'New Columbian Medals,' *AJN* 28 (1893): 35.

¹⁴ *Numismatic Art in America; Aesthetics of the United States Coinage*, 2nd edition, Cornelius Vermeule, Whitman Publishing, LLC, 2007, p. 87-88.



Sebastian del Piombo painting of Columbus (No. 39). Owned by the Duke of Talleyrand. Courtesy of *HathiTrust*, the *Report of the United States Commission to the Columbian Historical Exposition at Madrid, 1892-93; with special papers*, p. 229.

“Appendix C

Report of the Auditor to the President, June 30, 1895.

H. N. HIGINBOTHAM, *President*.

Dear Sir: I beg to present herewith my report giving classified statements of receipts, disbursements, assets, and liabilities of the World's Columbian Exposition, as of date June 30, 1895.

RECEIPTS

...

Souvenir Coins -	\$1,929,120.00
Premium on Souvenir Coins -	\$517,560.43

DISBURSEMENTS

...

General and Operating Expenses:

Souvenir Coin Expenses - \$129,150.54

The total expenditures to date have been twenty-eight million three hundred and forty thousand seven hundred dollars and forty-four cents (\$28,340,700.44).

The World's Columbian Exposition 6 percent debenture bonds principal (\$4,444,500) is not shown in this report, it having been paid in full and account closed.

ASSETS.

Composed of the Following:

Immediately Available—

Cash in Chicago banks..... \$425,998.60.

Available in the Future—

Chemical National Bank.... \$11,168.60.

CONDENSED BALANCE SHEET, 30TH JUNE, 1895.

...

Souvenir coins and premiums on same..... \$2,446,680.43 (\$1,223,340.215, coins)

...

The total expenditures to July 1, 1895. Both construction and general consolidated, and including in each case cost of buildings erected for special use, may be grouped as follows:

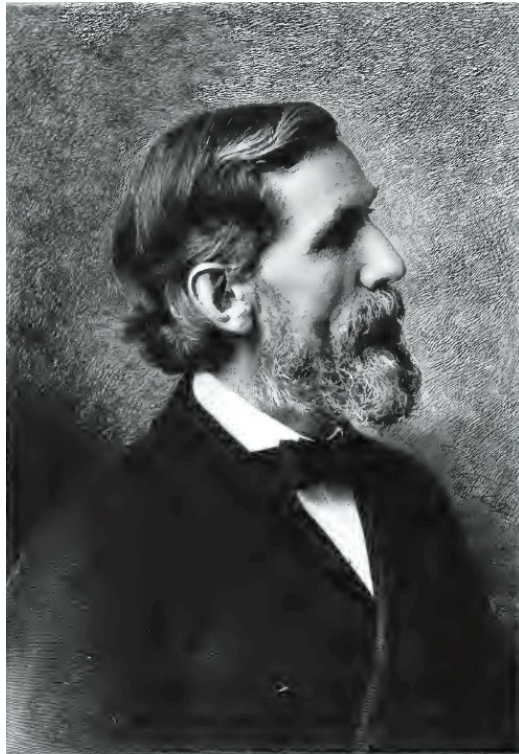
...

FINANCE.—Interests, commissions, souvenir coin expenses, treasurer's department, general expenses \$599,862.34

Very sincerely your obedient servant,

H. N. HIGINBOTHAM,

President, CHICAGO, January 1, 1898. "15



Harlow N. Higinbotham, President, World's Columbian Exposition. Courtesy *a History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893*, by authority of The Board of Directors. D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1897, p. Frontispiece.

FINANCE.—Interests, commissions, souvenir coin expenses, treasurer's department, general expenses \$599,862.34

Very sincerely your obedient servant,

H. N. HIGINBOTHAM,

President, CHICAGO, January 1, 1898. ¹⁵

Congressional Authorizing Act

[PUBLIC—NO. 203—52d CONGRESS]

Two denominations were coined; half-dollars in 1892 and 1893, and a quarter-dollar in 1893. The plan for the coinage of the half-dollars was placed before Congress and the following Act was approved: [Public—No. 203—52d Congress] An Act To aid in carrying out the act of Congress approved April twenty-fifth, eighteen hundred and ninety, entitled 'An act to provide for celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, by holding an international exposition of arts, industries, manufactures, and products of the soil, mine, and sea, in the city of Chicago, in the State of Illinois,' and appropriating money therefore. Be it

enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That for the purpose of aiding in defraying the cost of completing in a suitable manner the work of preparation for inaugurating the World's Columbian Exposition, authorized by the act of Congress approved April twenty-fifth, anno Domini eighteen hundred and ninety, to be held at the city of Chicago, in the State of Illinois, there shall be coined at the mints of the United States silver half-dollars of the legal weight and fineness, not to exceed five million pieces, to be known as the Columbian half-dollar, struck in commemoration of the World's Columbian Exposition, the devices and designs upon which shall be prescribed by the Director of the Mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury; and said silver coins shall be manufactured from uncurrent subsidiary silver coins now in the Treasury, and all provisions of law relative to the coinage, legal-tender quality, and redemption of the present subsidiary silver coins shall be applicable to the coins issued under this act, and when so recoined there is hereby appropriated from the Treasury the said five millions of souvenir half-dollars, and the Secretary of the Treasury is authorized to pay the same to the World's Columbian Exposition, upon estimates and vouchers certified by the president of the World's Columbian Exposition, . . . Provided, however, That before the Secretary of the Treasury shall pay to the World's Columbian Exposition any part of the said five million silver coins, satisfactory evidence shall be furnished him showing that the sum of at least ten million dollars has been collected and disbursed as required by said act:

And provided, That the said World's Columbian Exposition shall furnish a satisfactory guaranty to the Secretary of the Treasury that any further sum actually necessary to complete the work of said Exposition to the opening thereof has been or will be provided by said World's Columbian Exposition; but nothing herein shall be so construed as to delay or postpone the preparation of the souvenir coins hereinbefore provided for.

¹⁵ *Report of the President to the Board of Directors of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1892-1893*, CHICAGO: Rand, McNally & Co., 1898. pp. 5, 6, 66-70, 72-78, 96, 115-116, 169-170, 228-229, 240, 244-246, 339, 343, 349-350, 352.

And there is hereby appropriated, out of any moneys in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, the sum of fifty thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, to reimburse the Treasury for loss on the recoinage herein authorized.

Approved, August 5, 1892.

Addendum to the 1892/3 Columbian Exposition Half Dollar Cornelius Vermeule

Cornelius Vermeule writes: "The First Commemorative Coins:

The epic year 1892 also marked the appearance of the first commemorative coin, the half dollar issued to celebrate the World's Columbian Exposition of 1892 and 1893 in Chicago. The designs were overt products of the medallic academicism fostered by the officials of the Mint in Philadelphia, the obverse being the work of Charles Barber (portrait design by J.Q.A. Ward) and the reverse the creation of George Morgan. The total effect was one of dignity and, considering what had appeared for so long on the gold and silver coinage up to 1892, novelty of types. From the start controversy raged about the alleged portrait of Columbus on the obverse, and the reverse stirred considerable emotion, for the *Santa Maria* appears to be gliding on the two hemispheres as if they were giant tires (fig. 103). Arlie Slabaugh has written with his customary wit, 'The design received considerable criticism from the public, some suggesting that the portrait was not Columbus but Daniel Webster or Henry Ward Beecher. . .[Y]ou can take the portrait on any coin and someone will resemble it. Just as movie stars have 'doubles.' The only solution is to stop using people on coins.'⁴ At least it was a giant step forward to have produced a regular coin with someone other than Liberty on it, however controversial the portrait of the Admiral of the Ocean Seas might have been.

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4. Slabaugh, 12.

6. 'New Columbian Medals,' *AJN* 28 (1893): 35.